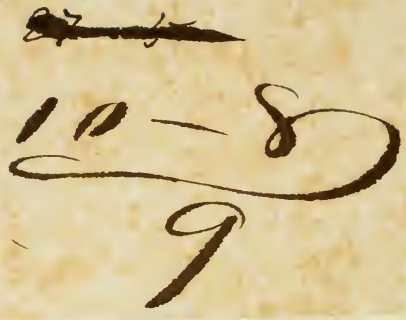

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THE WORKS

OF

BISHOP SHERLOCK.

VOL II.

THE WORKS

OF

BISHOP SHERLOCK.

WITH

SOME ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE,

SUMMARY OF EACH DISCOURSE, NOTES, &c.

BY THE REV. T. S. HUGHES, B. D.

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DISCOURSES.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXV.

PSALM LXXVII.—VERSES 9, 10.

PART I.

THE text shows that the author of this psalm was manifestly under great dejection of mind when he penned it; as he speaks of himself here and in the following verses as deserted of God, and preyed on by the sorrows of his own tormented heart. The particular grief is not mentioned; the sting of it however lay in this, that the Psalmist apprehended himself to be forsaken of God, which is doubtless the most insupportable and incurable of all afflictions, and one which neither medicine nor reason can assuage; for *the soul refuses to be comforted.* These fears and sorrows belong not to the vicious and profligate, who *have not God in all their thoughts:* they live without reflection, and therefore without concern, and can be diverted by hearing or seeing what modest and humble sinners suffer from a sense of religion: but their day of fear is not far off; and when it comes, it will convince them that *the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.* There is a great difference between the misgivings and misapprehensions of a religious

mind, and the fear which sinners often experience: this difference explained; whence we can distinguish between the fears to which religious men are subject, and the fears of the guilty; the former of which alone our text leads us to consider. The Psalmist manifestly speaks of the sorrows of a well-disposed heart, from the description which he gives of his conduct under distress; though he might doubt as to his own condition, and the favor of God towards him, yet of the being, power, and wisdom of God he never doubted. This faith was the sheet-anchor of his salvation. A consideration of this afflicted good man's train of thought, and of what he regarded his only comfort and support, recommended. Whether the calamities which afflicted him were public or private, yet as long as his thoughts dwelt on them, and led him to expostulate with God for the severity of his judgments, he found no ease nor relief: a weak man cannot judge rightly of the actions of a man wiser than himself; much less can a man judge of the ways of God, to whose councils he is not admitted: this topic enlarged on. Since then it is weakness to complain, and folly to judge, of the methods of God's providence, what part must we take? Must religion be senseless and stupid, and shut out all reflexion on the ways of God? No: one way is open to us; to trust and depend on God; which is so far from being senseless and stupid, that in the pursuit of it we shall see opening before us the noblest views which reason or religion can afford. The method here prescribed is that which the Psalmist prescribed to himself. *God has not left himself without witness:* the great works of nature and of grace proclaim his loving kindness to men; hence we must admire his power and adore his goodness; and therefore throw ourselves on his protection. Here then was the comfort of the Psalmist: here the cure of his grief, though the scene around him was dark and gloomy. The text then leads us to consider: I. that all complaints against Providence proceed from

weakness and the infirmity of human reason: II. that a settled peace of mind with respect to God, must arise from a due contemplation of the great works of Providence, which God has laid open for our consideration and instruction. Under the first head are included all the suspicions which are apt to rise in men's minds against Providence, as well as formal complaints: the first of this sort is, that God is too great and too excellent a being to humble himself to behold the things that are on earth. This one mistake seems to have been the whole of Epicurus's divinity: this topic enlarged on. To make his gods happy, he removed them from the government of men, whom he left alone without God or Providence: this thought, which has in all times been the refuge of sinners, has even entered into better minds, broken with grief, and tempted by their misfortunes to think thus. The grounds of this suspicion are weak and unreasonable: the fault is that men consider God's abilities to be like their own: but as it is absurd to argue from the powers of men to the powers of God, so is it to argue from the passions of men to the affections of the Deity: this point fully explained. Epicurus and his followers, who denied God's government of the world, denied also that he made it, and so far were consistent: but if we begin by considering the works of creation; if we *call to remembrance those years of the right hand of the Most High;* we shall, from these manifest and undeniable works of God, be led to conclude justly with respect to the methods of divine Providence: this point illustrated from the economy of the natural world. Another reason for suspicion of the conduct of Providence is, that men cannot discern any certain marks of God's interposition: they think that the inanimate and irrational parts of the world follow invariably a certain course of nature, and that men act as though given up to their own devices, and undirected by a superior power. The scoffers in St. Peter's time supported themselves on a similar observation,

that *all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;* concluding that they would go on so for ever, and that there was no future state to engage their concern. But here are two great mistakes: first, the conclusion is not rightly drawn from the observation, supposing the observation true: secondly, supposing the conclusion true, it does not answer the purposes intended. That the material world continues to answer the end designed, is the strongest evidence that it was made, and is conducted, by the highest wisdom and power: this fact illustrated from the edifices of human artists. Another objection is, that the world continues in one unwearied course, and a repetition of the same thing is no sign of wisdom or contrivance. This observation can arise only from what we see among men, where there is some foundation for it: but it is great weakness and want of thought to transfer this observation to God's works: this point enlarged on. But suppose the observation true, and the world to be now where it was at the beginning; yet no conclusion can be drawn from thence as to its future continuance: the absurdity of arguing from the past and present state of things to their end, explained. The other part of the objection, pointed against God's moral government of the world, examined. The great irregularity observable in human actions, and the mischiefs and iniquities which abound in the world, have tempted some to think that God does not concern himself with the actions of men, but has given them up to follow their own desires. It is justly observed, that there is a difference between the material and rational parts of the world: this difference explained. Matter, being capable of no action of itself, necessarily follows the impressions it receives: if, therefore, God is the mover, nothing but order and regularity can be expected. To suppose the material world to move irregularly and inconsistently with the end to be served, would be supposing God to act irregularly and inconsistently with the end of his own creation;

but in the moral world the case is otherwise: men have a power of acting for themselves, or else they could not be moral or rational agents: this topic enlarged on. The very difference observable in the conducting the material and the moral world, is the strongest presumption that they are under the direction of an all-wise being: this enlarged on. Moral agents cannot be invariably directed, from their very nature; and the actions of such beings will be wise and regular in proportion to their wisdom: it is then only want of thought and reflexion which furnishes objections, from the present state of things, against a divine Providence. But farther; though men are moral agents, yet this excludes not God's providence from human affairs, because this may be exerted consistently with their freedom; and the distribution of rewards and punishments may be effected without overruling the wills or actions of the good and bad. God's power of life and death alone is sufficient for conducting the great affairs of the world: and the great variety of accidents, which cannot happen but as God thinks fit, may be effectual to punish or reward individuals, without any visible interposition of Providence. These secret methods do not indeed justify God's righteousness in the eyes of men, nor is it pretended that they are adopted for an exact administration of justice in every case: it is sufficient that they are, or may be so used, over moral beings in a state of probation; which is a very different thing from the final administration of justice. Nor can the apparent unequal distribution of good and evil in this life be any objection to God's government over the world, unless it be proved that there will not be a day of reckoning hereafter: for supposing a future state, the present condition of things is quite consistent with divine justice; which sleeps not, but waits to see full proof of the righteousness or the unrighteousness of men. At the appointed dissolution of this frame of things, the material world will have done its office, and may lie by till called out again by the Creator:

but not so the moral world, for which another scene is prepared; where all must answer for the use they made of God's gifts. Conclusion: exhorting men from all these considerations to contemplate divine Providence; whence they will see reason to confess their own weakness, and to say with the Psalmist, *it is mine own infirmity.*

PART II.

The suspicions which incline men to doubt whether God does at all concern himself in human affairs having been considered, we now come to consider the suspicions which, consistently with admitting a general care of Providence over the world, lead men to fear that they are neglected or unkindly treated by God: this the case of the Psalmist, and these his fears. Of God's government he doubted not; he applied to him in his trouble, but his grief was, that he found no return to his prayers; *when he remembered God, he was troubled; when he complained, his Spirit was overwhelmed;* but this good man was so well grounded in religion, that in spite of doubts and fears, he pronounced rightly in his own case of his suspicions, *this is my infirmity;* he called to his aid the reflexion, *I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.* Admitting then God's providence to extend over the whole world, it may be doubted whether this case descends to particulars, and regards the actions and well-being of individuals; which, singly considered, have very little influence on the well-being of the whole. With respect to the material world, we may easily discern that this suspicion is groundless, and built on the weak conceit that it is too troublesome to Providence to attend to the minute things of the world: this topic enlarged on. The case is not so plain with respect to moral agents and God's government over them: the reason of this shown from their very nature. With respect to the care of Providence over

particular men, we may consider that every man consists of two parts; one material, which is the body; the other rational, which is the mind: with regard to the former, every single man manifestly depends on the preservation and care of providence, as manifestly as the great bodies of the world do: this point enlarged on: hence our Saviour's question, as related by St. Matthew vi. 26.: this passage fully explained. Nor do we want more direct proofs of God's care for men as moral agents: of this sort are the impressions and intimations which we receive from nature, that is, from the hand of our Creator, for our government and direction: the knowlege of good and evil, the power of conscience, the passions of hope and fear, the sense of honor and shame, which are natural to man, are proofs of God's care, considered as moral agents; and not the less so from their being common to all men; though possibly for that reason they have been less considered in this light. Was God to speak directly to every man, and rebuke every sinner, we should not doubt of his care for particular moral agents; but we might reasonably doubt, how consistent such methods would be with the freedom necessary to the morality of human actions: and yet this same care is taken, and the same things are done in a manner and method which do not interfere with the freedom of moral agents. This point fully explained from a consideration of the moral sense and human passions: these are undeniable proofs of God's care for moral agents, and they reach to every particular man's case, who has not extinguished the power of conscience. That this providence also extends farther, and interposes to bless and prosper the righteous, to punish and confound the wicked, cannot be doubted in a general way; though to particularise it is difficult and sometimes presumptuous, as the appearances of things will not answer to the observation: this point enlarged on. Another difficulty is, that the blessings of the righteous, and the punishment of the wicked in this world, seem to be con-

veyed by such natural means, and to be so according to the common course of things, that men seldom think of an immediate interposition of Providence, and there are hardly grounds to prove it; but to balance this difficulty, let it be considered: first, that an immediate and visible interposition of Providence in behalf of the righteous, and for the punishment of the wicked, would interfere with the freedom of moral agents, and not leave room for their trial: this is a sufficient reason for not using this method: secondly, that this reason only excludes such methods of rewards and punishments here as are inconsistent with free actions; but does not exclude any methods not liable to this objection: thirdly, that the natural course of things being under the direction of God, it is reasonable to believe that they are often disposed for the benefit of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked; though we cannot observe it, as every thing appears natural and ordinary. The first proposition has been considered; and the second is but a consequence of it: of the third no man can doubt who believes at all in the providence of God: this made out from a consideration of storms and plagues, and earthquakes, and such like events. If this then can be done, it is reasonable to think that it is done; it being altogether agreeable with the goodness and justice of God, and not inconsistent with his government of moral agents: the truth of this observation is equally applicable to nations and individuals; for there are a thousand accidents in life (so we call them) on which the fortunes of men depend; and how easy must it be for the power that presides over these accidents, to determine the fate of men, and at the same time to escape their observation! Though it be unreasonable, because inconsistent with God's government, to expect that he should appear openly in support of good men, yet it is rational to expect, from his providence, *that all things shall work together for the good of those who love him.* This leads to the great difficulty of the case, which relates to the

sufferings of good men, and the suspicions which they are apt to entertain of God's kindness to them when under affliction. These complaints to be met with in Scripture are of two sorts: one regards the national calamities of the Jews; the other the sufferings of particular men. The first is made the subject of the Psalmist's complaint in the text, as is probable from the conclusion of the psalm; but however the Psalmist might be affected by the calamities of the people to whom he was so nearly related, yet from the scripture history of this people, we can hardly think their sufferings an objection to Providence: the reason of this explained. But the case of suffering nations in general is rendered so intricate by a great variety of circumstances, that it is hard to form a distinct judgment on it: this case fully made out from the following observations. I. Vice and immorality naturally tend to destroy nations and governments, which is agreeable to our notion of God's justice and goodness. II. It is also agreeable to our sense of justice and goodness, that nations quite corrupt and degenerate should not be suffered to prosper, and thus spread the contagion of their iniquities. III. These principles allowed, the difficulty is in the application of them to particular cases: which application depending on circumstances which we cannot know, the objection arises, not from the reason of the case, but from our ignorance of it: and where is the wonder that there should be many things in the divine government which we cannot comprehend? This topic enlarged on: whoever therefore enters into this complaint, may say with the Psalmist, *it is my infirmity*. The miseries of which good men have a share in all public calamities next considered. Complaints in this case must be considered as made by others in behalf of those who suffer, or by the sufferers themselves; in the former case, a fact is assumed of which there is no proof, that the sufferers are righteous and innocent: hence it is a great weakness and infirmity to complain against Provi-

dence in such a case. The characters of men, in the eye of the world, depend on their outward behaviour; and we must judge and act according to this rule, which in God's dealings with mankind it is unsafe to follow, as it may easily misguide us, since the inward principles and sentiments of a man are only known to God, *who searcheth the heart and reins:* this topic enlarged on. But farther, even the sufferings of him who appears to be and is a good man, may give no just occasion for complaint; since good men sometimes want admonitions to awaken their care, and trials to perfect their faith: unless therefore you can judge certainly of the end and purposes of providence in permitting a good man to suffer, you can never with reason pass sentence on the ways of God. This is also true, when the righteous perish, to the eyes of the world, miserably: of which case the holy martyrs are instances. The truth is, since all men must die, in the time and manner of death the difference cannot be great; and though it may be hard to reconcile ourselves to death, especially to unnatural and violent death, yet it can really be no loss to a good man to die sooner: and this will account for the case of the righteous, supposed to suffer in the destruction of a wicked nation: they fall like other men, but they fall into the hands of God, who knows how to distinguish their case, and to compensate their miseries. On the principles, therefore, of reason and religion, no objection can lie against divine Providence on account of their sufferings. But who will say of a sufferer complaining in his own behalf, that a righteous man is suffering unjustly? We pray daily to God, *not to enter into judgment with us:* before a man then enters into judgment with God, let him ask himself, whether he has been guilty of no offence to deserve the punishment which he suffers? whether he is sufficiently perfect and approved as to want no trial? As to the suspicions of Providence, and the care of God over us, which have in them a mixture of religious melancholy, they are of

another consideration: they are often great bodily infirmities, and deserve compassion and assistance: but these disorders do not usually break out against Providence, but rather turn on the sufferers themselves, who despair of mercy from not thinking themselves worthy of it: they therefore belong not to the present subject.

Conclusion: showing the danger of censuring the methods of God's government: this point enlarged on, from a consideration of human governments. The great works of God, if duly attended to, declare his wisdom, goodness, and power; and the voice of nature speaks in the language of the wise king, *trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to thine own understanding*. Happy are they who listen to this voice! whilst others, full of their own wisdom, daily condemn what they understand not; and if ever they recover their right reason, their first step must be to confess with the Psalmist, *it is my own infirmity*.

DISCOURSE XXV.

PSALM LXXVII.—VERSES 9, 10.

Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?

And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.

PART I.

WHOEVER was the author of this psalm, he was manifestly under a great dejection of mind when he penned it: he speaks of himself as deserted of God, and given up to be a prey to the sorrows of his own disturbed, tormented heart. 'His soul refused comfort,' as he complains in the second verse: 'When he remembered God, he was troubled; when he complained, his spirit was overwhelmed,' as he laments in the third verse.

What the particular grief was, which gave rise to this mournful complaint, does not appear; but whatever it was, the sting of it lay in this, that the Psalmist apprehended himself to be forsaken of God: and without doubt this is of all afflictions the most afflicting, the most insupportable; a grief it is, which no medicine can reach, which all the powers of reason can hardly assist, for 'the soul refuses to be comforted.'

These fears, these sorrows, belong not to the vicious and profligate, who 'have not God in all their thoughts:' they live without reflexion, and therefore without concern; and can be extremely diverted with hearing or seeing what modest and humble sinners suffer from a sense of religion: but bold and fearless as such men are, their day of fear is not far off, it draws near apace: and when it comes, will convince them of the truth of the wise preacher's observation: 'The heart of

the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.'

There is a very great difference between the misgivings and misapprehensions of a religious mind, and the fear to which sinners are always exposed, and which oftentimes they experience. The fears of the religious are frequently ill-grounded, and arise from their not rightly considering and understanding their own case, or the methods of God's providence in relation to this world: but the sinner's fear is never ill-grounded, for if the profligate sinner has not reason to fear God, there can be no such thing as a reasonable fear in the world. The religious man may fear in the hours of his weakness and infirmity; the sinner can only fear when he comes to his right reason, and a due sense of his condition.

This observation will serve to distinguish between the fears to which the religious are subject, and which the text leads us to consider; and the fears of guilt, which are foreign to our present purpose, and to be treated in quite a different manner.

That the Psalmist speaks of the sorrows of a religious well-disposed heart, is manifest from the description he gives of his conduct and behavior under his distress: he was sorely troubled, but 'in the day of his trouble he sought the Lord:' verse 2. He was afflicted, but in his affliction he 'remembered God:' verse 3. Whatever doubts he entertained as to his own condition, and the favor of God towards him, yet of the being, the power, and wisdom of God he never doubted. This faith, which in his utmost extremity he held fast, proved to be his sheet-anchor, and saved him from the shipwreck which the storms and tempests raised in his own breast seemed to threaten.

It is worth our while to observe the train of thought which this afflicted good man pursued, and what were the reflexions in which he rested at last, as his best and only comfort and support.

Whether the calamities which afflicted him were private to himself, or public to his people and country; yet as long as his thoughts dwelt on them, and led him into expostulations with God for the severity of his judgments, he found no ease or re-

lief. A weak man cannot rightly judge of the actions even of a man wiser than himself, of whose views and designs he is not master; much less can any man judge of the ways of God, to whose councils he is not admitted, and to whose secrets he is a stranger. And though it is but too natural for men, when they consider the sins of others, to complain for want of justice in the world, and when they consider their own, of want of mercy; yet in both cases do they act weakly and inconsistently, pretending to judge where they want not only authority to decide, but even understanding sufficient to try, the cause. The Psalmist complained heavily, 'Has God forgotten to be gracious: hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?' But what did he get by this complaint? was he not forced immediately to confess the impropriety and folly of it? 'I said, this is my infirmity.' He said very rightly: in complaining, he followed the natural impressions of passion and impatience; in acknowleging the folly of his complaint, he spoke not only the language of grace, but of sense and reason.

What must we do then? since it is weakness to complain, and folly to judge, of the methods of God's providence, what is there left for us to do? and what part must we take? Must religion be senseless and stupid, and shut out all reflexion on the ways of God? No: one way there is still left open to us; to trust and to depend on God: and a way it is so far from being senseless and stupid, that in pursuit of it we shall see opening before us the noblest views that reason or religion can afford.

I am not prescribing to you a method of my own; it is the very method the Psalmist prescribed to himself. 'God has not left himself without witness;' the great works of nature and of grace proclaim aloud his loving-kindness to the children of men. If we consider them attentively, we must admire his power and adore his goodness: and when we see such power united with so much goodness towards us, it is but a natural step to throw ourselves on his protection; to trust the hand that once made us, and has always saved us. When I complain, says the Psalmist, 'it is my infirmity;' but 'I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders

of old. I will meditate also of all thy works, and talk of all thy doings.' Here then was his comfort, here the cure of all his grief: the scene around him was dark and gloomy; but dark as it was, it was under the guidance and direction of the hand that had never failed the faithful, to deliver him out of all his troubles.

The text, and the occasion of it, thus explained, lead us to consider these two propositions:

First, that all complaints against Providence proceed from weakness and the infirmity of human reason.

Secondly, that a settled peace of mind, with respect to God, must arise from a due contemplation of the great works of Providence, which God has laid open to our view for our consideration and instruction.

The first proposition is, that all complaints against Providence proceed from weakness and the infirmity of human reaon. Under this head are included all the suspicions that are apt to rise in men's minds against Providence, as well as the formal complaints brought against it. And the first of this sort, which naturally presents itself to the mind, when we consider God and ourselves, is this, that God is too great and too excellent a being to humble himself to behold the things that are on earth. This one mistake seems to have been the whole of Epicurus's divinity. He thought it would be endless for the gods to attend to every thing that passed on earth, and to concern themselves with the conduct and behavior of every particular man in the world: he thought they could not do this without being moved sometimes to anger and resentment, and sometimes to the passion of joy: which he conceived to be equally inconsistent with an uniform settled state of happiness. To make therefore his gods happy, he removed them from all government of men, and left men to shift as they could, without God or Providence, in the world.

The same thought has in all times been the refuge of sinners; their language has ever been, 'How doth God know, and is there knowlege in the Most High?' Perhaps too this suspicion has entered into better minds, broken with grief and affliction, and tempted by their misfortunes to think that God regards not the things below.

But how different soever the grounds of this suspicion may be in one case, and in another, yet in every case it is manifestly weak and unreasonable.

To imagine that it is too much trouble, or any trouble, to God to govern the world, and all the beings in it, is a mere childish conceit; it is talking of God, as if God were a man, and as liable to be fatigued and tired with multiplicity of business as a man is. How do you know that there is any thing tiresome or disagreeable in much business, and in variety of employment? It is true, you find it is so in yourself, and you observe it is so in others: you may therefore very well conclude that much business is tiresome to men like yourself: but by what reason do you extend this conclusion to God? unless you think he is in this respect like you, and that he has no larger powers and abilities than you have.

As it is absurd to argue from the powers of men to the powers of God, so it is likewise to argue from the passions of men to the affections of the Deity. Men may be grieved and tormented with seeing affairs under their conduct go wrong, may be overjoyed at some unexpected success; but can this ever be the case of a being of infinite power and infinite wisdom? Nothing can happen but what he orders or permits, for his power is over all: nothing that he orders or permits can be wrong, for his wisdom is equal to his power. What disappointments then are there to grieve him? what unexpected success to transport him? You see now that this suspicion, which set out with supposing God to be so great and excellent a being, that the affairs of men were below his care, concludes with making him so like a man, as not to be able to bear the fatigue and vexation of so much business.

Epicurus and his followers, who denied God's government of the world, denied also that he made it. So far at least they were consistent; for if they thought it too much trouble for God to govern the world, they could not consistently put him to the trouble of making it. But if we turn the argument, and begin with considering the works of the creation, and, according to the instruction of the Psalmist, 'call to remembrance those years of the right hand of the Most High;' we shall, from these manifest and undeniable works of God, be led to

just conclusions with respect to the methods of divine providence, less obvious to our observation, in the government of the world. When we shall see the hand of God employed in forming the lowest, and, in our eyes, the most contemptible creatures on earth; ranging and adjusting all the parts of the world so, that there is not a particle of matter but what has its proper place in subserviency to the whole of the creation; it will be impossible for a reasonable man to think that God has no care of this world, which with so much care and wisdom he created; or that it should be below him to preserve those beings, which he did not think it below him to make. But this consideration belongs to the second proposition, and will meet us again in its proper place. To proceed then:

Another reason which some have for suspecting that the affairs of the world are not under the conduct of Providence, is, that they cannot discern any certain marks of God's interposing: on the contrary, they think it evident that all the inanimate and irrational parts of the world follow a certain course of nature invariably; and that men act with all the signs of being given up to follow their own devices, without being either directed or restrained by a superior power.

That many men talk and think in this way, there is no doubt. The scoffers in St. Peter's time supported themselves on this observation, 'that all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation:' concluding that they would go on so for ever, and there was nothing beyond this present state of things for which they ought to be concerned.

But in this way of reasoning there are two great mistakes:

1. That the conclusion is not rightly drawn from the observation, supposing the observation to be true.

2. Supposing the conclusion to be true, it will not answer the purpose intended.

1. That the material world continues to answer the purposes for which it was created, is surely, when rightly considered, the strongest evidence that it was made, and is conducted, by the highest wisdom and power. Is it any praise to a workman, or any proof of his skill and ability, that the house of his building is running to ruin, and that it wants reforming and supporting every year? Surely every man

would choose, if he could, to have his habitation secured against the injuries of time and accidents. And can we expect less of a house, whose builder is God, than that it should continue firm and stable, and without decay, during the time intended and limited for its continuance? If all things therefore continue as they were from the beginning of the creation, it proves that they were extremely well made at first, and have been extremely well preserved ever since: and can this afford to a man of any thought or reflexion an objection against Providence?

It may be said perhaps, that it is not merely the continuing of the world that is the objection, but its continuing always in one unwearied course. The sun rises and sets now, just as it did three or four thousand years ago: and what sign is there of wisdom or contrivance in doing the same thing over and over again for ages together? This observation can arise only from what we see among men; and with respect to men there is foundation for it: but it is great weakness and want of thought to transfer this observation to the works of God. Men are improving daily in knowlege and experience, and may have good reason to alter this year what they did the last, the better to suit their pleasure or convenience: but can any man be so weak as to think this to be the case of the Almighty? Do you imagine God was young and unexperienced when he made the world, and that he sees faults in it now which he did not see then? If you do not think this, what reason can you give why the world should not go on now as it did from the beginning? If God made it in the best manner at first, and without doubt he did, can there be any just cause for alteration?

But farther: supposing the observation true, that the world is now where it was at the beginning; yet no conclusion can be drawn from thence as to the future continuance of the world. For though this system of things shall keep its appointed course during the time determined by God for its continuance, yet neither can the present nor the past state of things enable us in the least degree to judge when the end will be. And whoever reasons in this way may just as well say such a man lived in good health the last twenty years, and therefore he shall live in good health for twenty more. The

argument concludes alike in both cases, however the absurdity may appear shocking only in one.

But supposing we should allow even the conclusion to be right, and that the material world may go on without end: what is it to the purpose? Whatever becomes of the world, you can last but a little time. Your condition hereafter will not depend on the lasting of the sun or moon, or be in the least influenced by it. Let them move on for ever; yet if you in the mean time are to be miserable, and to suffer for your iniquities, what will you be the better for it? If this world should last for ever, may there not be other states for the reception of good and bad spirits, when separate from the body? If there may, how is religion, or the belief of God's government in the rational and moral world, at all concerned in this speculation? And how weak and how absurd a thing is it for men, who know they must die, and may die to-day or to-morrow, to harden their hearts against the belief of Providence, by speculating on the durableness of things without themselves; when their only true concern is, and ought to be, to know what will become of themselves, being very sure that they cannot continue long here? Our Saviour has told us that in his 'Father's house are many mansions:' this mansion in which we now live may continue, and yet we may be transferred to other mansions to be happy or miserable, according as we have behaved ourselves in this.

Let us consider now, whether the other part of the objection, pointed against God's moral government of the world, has any better foundation in reason to support it.

The great irregularity observable in human actions, and the mischiefs and iniquities which abound in the world, have tempted some to think that God concerns not himself with the actions of men, but has given them up intirely to follow their own devices.

It is truly and justly observed, that there is this difference between the material and rational parts of the world; that the material world, and the several parts of it, act regularly and uniformly, pursuing constantly the ends and appointments of nature; whilst moral agents act variously, and often inconsistently with the great ends to which they are ordained. But

I wonder any man, capable of making this observation, should not at the same time see the true reason of it, supposing both parts to be under God's government.

Matter, being capable of no action of itself, must necessarily follow the impressions it receives: supposing God to govern the world, the material parts of it must follow the immediate impressions of his hand; and where God is the mover, can you expect any thing less than order and regularity, and a constant subserviency to the great ends of the creation? To suppose therefore the material world to move irregularly and inconsistently with the end to be served, would be supposing God to act irregularly and inconsistently with the end of his own creation.

But in the moral world the case is otherwise: men have a power of acting and choosing for themselves; and were it otherwise, they could not be rational or moral agents. Were God therefore to determine the actions of men as absolutely and uncontrollably as he directs the emotions of the material world, men would be, to all intents and purposes, as much parts of the material world as the trees and plants which grow in it. And such a method of government would destroy and overthrow the very end for which rational agents were created: for to what purpose were reason and understanding given to men, but to guide and direct them, and to make them capable of discharging the duties of religion and morality? But if the powers of reason and understanding were to be perpetually overruled, to prevent the irregularities and mischiefs which proceed from the free use of them; what would it be but making men rational and moral agents by the law of their creation, and then putting them under a government which leaves no room for reason or morality? which is such a part as no wise man would act, and which no reasonable man would ascribe to God.

Indeed, this very difference observable in the conducting the material and the moral world, is the strongest presumption that the whole is under the direction of the all-wise Being. On supposition that God governs the world, would you not expect to see all things directed in a way suitable to their nature, and the end for which they were made? Material

beings require to be absolutely and uncontrollably directed, for they have no power to direct themselves; consequently their motions must be just and regular, or otherwise, according to the wisdom and ability of the director: and if God be that director, they must ever be just and regular.

Moral agents cannot be so directed; for it is essential to the nature of a moral being to act and choose for itself; and the actions of such beings will be wise and regular, in proportion to the wisdom of such beings; where they are weak and infirm, they will oftentimes be very irregular and blameworthy. That men are weak and infirm wants no proof; consequently, there must be great signs of weakness and imperfection in their moral behavior.

Since then it is evident, *a priori*, that the government of the world, supposing it to be under the government of God, must be what it now appears to be; it can be only want of thought and reflexion which furnishes objections, from the present state of things, against a divine Providence.

But farther: though it is necessary to leave men, considered as moral agents, to choose and act freely; yet this is far from excluding the providence of God from interposing in human affairs: the reason is, because this may be done many ways consistently with the freedom of men; and wicked men may be punished, and good men rewarded, even in this world, without overruling the wills or actions of either. A little reflexion will clear this up to every man's mind; and therefore I shall say no more than is necessary to explain my meaning.

The power of life and death, which is in the hand of God, is alone sufficient for conducting the great affairs of the world. It is natural for men to die; and when they do die, nobody is surprised at so common an event: and yet it is evident that the well-being of whole nations often depends on the life or death of a few men: let them live or let them die, nobody's liberty or freedom of action is affected by it; yet the peace and security of whole countries, or the utter ruin and destruction of them, may depend intirely on the event.

With respect to private men, and their happiness or misery here; if we consider how much every man's good or ill fortune

in the world depends on variety of accidents, which may happen one way or other, but must happen as God shall think proper; it will be easy to conceive that men may be effectually punished for their iniquities, or rewarded for their virtue, by a train of things appearing to be natural and common, without the visible interposition of Providence.

These secret methods do not indeed justify the righteousness of God in the eyes of men; nor is it pretended that they are made use of for an exact administration of justice in every case; but it is sufficient if they are or may be used to all the necessary purposes of government over moral beings in a state of probation; which is a very different thing from the final administration of justice. And whatever inequalities may appear to us in the distribution of good or evil in this life, they cannot stand as objections to God's government over the world, unless you can prove that there will be no day of reckoning hereafter: for supposing a future state, it is quite consistent with divine justice to permit things to be as we see they are now; since justice does not sleep, but waits with patience to see the full proof of the righteousness or unrighteousness of men.

When the appointed time shall come for dissolving this frame of things, the material world will have done its office, and may lie by, till called out by the Creator to serve other uses: but for the moral world there is another scene prepared, in which they must account for their conduct and behavior in this; and answer for the use they made of those great and excellent gifts of reason and understanding with which God endowed them.

Lay all these things together, and consider in one view the whole scheme of divine Providence: then try over again the misgivings of mind, and the suspicions you have entertained against God's government of the world, and you will perhaps see reason to confess your own weakness, and say with the Psalmist, 'It is mine own infirmity.'

DISCOURSE XXV.

PART II.

THE suspicions which incline men to doubt whether God does at all concern himself with human affairs, have been considered: I shall proceed now to consider the suspicions which, consistently with admitting a general care of Providence over the world, lead men to fear that they themselves are either neglected or unkindly treated by God. This seems to have been the Psalmist's own case, and these the fears which possessed his mind. Of God's government of the world he entertained no doubt; he applied to him in his trouble and distress; but his grief was that he found no return to his prayers; his sorrows continued and increased: 'when he remembered God, he was troubled; when he complained, his spirit was overwhelmed.'

But this good man, being well grounded in religion, was able so far to get the better of his doubts and fears, as to pass a right judgment in his own case, and to pronounce of all his suspicions, 'This is my infirmity:' and to call to his assistance the proper reflexions which the great works of Providence administered for the support and confirmation of his hope and confidence towards God, 'I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.'

Now it being admitted that God is not regardless of the world, but that his providence is watchful for the preservation of the whole, it may be doubted whether this care descends to particulars, and regards the actions and the well-being of individuals; which, singly considered, make but a small part of the whole, and whose fortunes, be they good or bad, have very little influence on the well-being of the whole.

If we consider this suspicion with respect to the material world, a little reflexion will help us to discern that it is intirely groundless, and built on the weak conceit that it will be too troublesome to Providence to attend to the very minute things of the world. For the minutest parts of matter follow the laws of God and nature as constantly and as regularly as the great

constituent parts of the world, and work in their proper sphere as strongly for the good and preservation of the whole. The warmth and comfort which you receive from the fire in your chamber, is as much owing to the laws and constitutions appointed and maintained by God, as the warmth and comfort you receive from the sun: and the light of a candle is as truly the work of God, and as much depending on his preservation and execution of the laws of nature, as the light of the heavenly bodies. If any man thinks otherwise, let him try to account for these lesser phenomena of nature, and he will find himself under the same necessity of recurring to the influence of a superior overruling power, as when he attempts to account for the motions of the great bodies in the firmament.

With respect to moral agents and God's government over them, the case is not quite so plain: and there is a plain reason why it is not: because moral agents would not be moral agents, if they were as regularly moved by an overruling power as material beings are and must be; since they can only act as they are acted, which is the reason why all their actings are regular and uniform because the immediate agent is God.

But with respect to particular men, and the care of Providence over them, we may consider that every man consists of two parts; one material, which is the body; another rational, which is the mind. With respect to the material part, every single man manifestly depends on the preservation and care of Providence, as manifestly as the great bodies of the world depend on the same care. The motion of the heart in a man no more depends on his will or on his own wisdom, than the motion of the moon does. The same may be said of all the animal functions which depend on involuntary motions, not under the influence or direction of the will. The life then of every particular man, which depends on these animal functions, depends on the preservation of Providence. And thus far we see, that by the same way of reasoning that we conclude God's government to extend to the whole of the creation, his care and government extends to individual men. This being allowed, can we possibly suppose that God, who shows so much care for men, as they are material animal beings, should intirely neglect them, considered as moral agents? This is the very

question which our Saviour asks in a like case, Matt. vi. 26. 'Behold,' says he, 'the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?' In like manner we say, behold yourselves as ye are material beings; do not all the motions of the body, on which life depends, discover to you the hand of God supporting and maintaining your life and being here? Consider once more; are you not, as rational beings, and moral agents, much more worthy of his care? and can he, whose care descends to you as animals, be supposed to neglect you as moral agents?

But as strong as this proof is, by way of inference and conclusion, we do not want more direct proofs of God's care for men as moral agents. Of this sort are all the impressions and intimations which we receive from nature, that is, from the hand of our Creator, for our government and direction as moral agents: the knowlege of the difference of good and evil, the power of conscience, the passions of hope and fear, the sense of honor and of shame, which are natural to all men, and may be said to be born with them, are so many proofs of the care of God for us, considered as moral agents: and they are not the less so for being common to all men; though possibly they have, for that reason, been less considered in this light.

Was God to speak directly to every man, and teach him his duty, was he visibly to rebuke every sinner, you would not doubt of his care for particular moral agents; but you might doubt, perhaps with good reason, how consistent such methods would be with the freedom which is necessary to the morality of human actions. But now the same care is taken, the same instructions, the same admonitions given; with this only difference, that they are conveyed in a manner and a method which do not interfere with the freedom of moral agents. Consider a little: when you find that you have a natural notion of the difference of good and evil, and consequently of the great duties of morality, who then is your teacher and instructor? What you have from nature, you have from the Author of nature; and if your sense of moral good and evil be indeed natural, you learnt it from God, and from him only. If the power of conscience be natural to a rational mind, who is it that ad-

monishes you when conscience flies in your face? Must it not be he who placed the power of conscience in every rational mind, to act there as his deputy, in restraining, rebuking, and correcting every iniquity? When you are moved by a sense of honor to do things that are virtuous and praiseworthy, and encouraged and supported by hope of reward; when you are restrained from evil by the sense of shame, or deterred by the fear of punishment; whence have you these great assistances and encouragements to virtue, these guards and defences against vice? If these are natural passions, and undoubtedly they are, it is God who calls you daily by these his messengers into the ways of honor and virtue, and warns you to flee from vice and iniquity.

These are undeniable proofs of God's care for moral agents; and they reach to every particular man's case, who has not extinguished the powers of conscience, and the natural sense of honor and shame.

That the providence of God over particular men extends still farther, and often interposes to bless and prosper the righteous, to punish and confound the wicked, there can be no doubt in general, though it is always difficult, and generally presumptuous, to pretend to judge in particular instances; for the appearances of things will not answer to the observation; the wicked being sometimes suffered to triumph in this world, and virtue left to struggle with many hardships and distresses: which is the case of the Psalmist in the text, complaining that 'God had forgotten to be gracious;' and has been, and, in the reason of the thing, must be the case of many righteous men in every age.

But this is not the only difficulty in the case: for when the wicked suffer here as they deserve, and the righteous prosper in their undertakings; yet the blessings on one side, and the punishments on the other, seem to be conveyed by such natural means, and so much to be expected from the common course of things, that men seldom think of an immediate interposition of Providence, and there are hardly grounds on which to prove it. But, to balance this difficulty, let it be considered,

First, that an immediate and visible interposition of Providence in behalf of the righteous, and for the punishment of the

wicked, would interfere with the freedom of moral agents, and not leave room for their trial: and this is a sufficient reason for not using this method.

Secondly, that this reason excludes only such methods of rewarding virtue and punishing vice here, as are inconsistent with freedom of actions; but does by no means exclude any methods not liable to this objection.

Thirdly, that the natural course of things being under the direction of God, it is reasonable to believe that they are oftentimes disposed for the benefit of the righteous, and for the punishment of the wicked; though such disposition of things cannot fall under our observation, every thing appearing to happen according to a natural and ordinary course.

The first proposition has been already considered; and the second is but the immediate consequence of it: of the third there can remain no doubt with any man who believes that the providence of God has any concern at all in the affairs of the world. That whole nations may suffer by unseasonable weather, by storms and tempests, by lightning or by earthquakes, is manifest in experience: that all these things, whenever they happen, are looked on as natural events, is allowed: admitting then, that these things are under the government of God, and happen as he thinks fit to direct, the consequence is manifest, that God can, whenever he pleases, punish wicked nations or reward good ones, by a secret disposition of the course of nature, without any such interposition as is inconsistent with the method of his government over rational and moral beings.

And if this can be done, it is highly reasonable to think it is done; it being in all its views agreeable to the goodness and justice of God, and not inconsistent with the government of moral agents. The truth of this observation is not confined to the case of nations only; it is the same with respect to particular persons: there are a thousand accidents in life (so we call them) on which the fortunes of men depend: as these things happen one way or other, a man is made or undone; and how easy must it be for the power that presides over all these accidents, to determine the fate of men, and at the same time to escape their observation! Though it be unreasonable, because inconsistent with the methods of the divine government over

men, to expect from God that he should openly appear in the support of good men; yet it is rational to expect from his providence, 'that all things shall work together' (which is the language of Scripture) 'for the good of those who love him.'

And this leads to another, and indeed the great difficulty of the case, which relates to the sufferings of good men, and the suspicion they are apt to entertain of God's kindness towards them, whilst they suffer under the weight of his afflicting hand.

The complaints of this sort to be met with in Scripture are of two sorts: one regards the national calamities of the Jews; the other, the sufferings of particular men.

The first made the subject of the Psalmist's complaint in the text; as is probable from the conclusion of the Psalm, in which he reckons up the great things formerly done by God for the deliverance of his people; and concludes with one of the greatest, 'Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.' His seeking comfort, from a remembrance of God's great kindnesses to Israel, intimates that his sorrow was on account of their sufferings.

But however the Psalmist might be affected by the calamities of the people to whom he was so nearly related; yet whoever reads the history of this people in their own books, will hardly think that their sufferings, as a nation, stand as an objection to Providence: they were under the highest obligations to obedience, and the most forward to disobey of any other: and it appears that, as often as they repented of their iniquity, they were saved from such destructions as seemed to leave no hope for their restoration. But the case of suffering nations in general, without considering the merit of any particular nation, is so intricated by a great variety of circumstances, that it is hard to form a distinct judgment. The iniquity of a nation is made up of the iniquities of many; and, it may be presumed, no nation was ever so bad, but that there were some good people in it: these, be they many or few, are involved in the general ruin, and their case makes a distinct difficulty. Now, though it be scarce possible for us, who can with no certainty judge of each other, to estimate the virtue and vice of nations, so as to say when they are ripe for destruction, yet there are some general observations which lie within our reach, that will

help to justify the providence of God in this part of divine government, and silence complaints on this head.

First, there is a natural tendency in vice and immorality to weaken and destroy nations and governments; and that it should be so is agreeable, in general, to the notion we have of God's justice and goodness.

Secondly, it is also agreeable to our sense of justice and goodness, that nations, quite degenerate and corrupted, should not be suffered to continue and prosper, and to spread their vice and iniquity by means of their power and authority.

Thirdly, these principles allowed, the whole difficulty lies in the application of them to particular cases; which application to particular cases depending on circumstances which we cannot possibly know, the objection arises, not from the reason of the case, but merely from our ignorance of it: and where is the wonder that there should be many things in the administration of divine government, the reasons of which we cannot comprehend? The general method of Providence, in exalting virtuous and sober nations, in humbling the proud and profligate, is confessedly agreeable to justice; and no man can complain of it. There is no room therefore for any complaint at all, but when these rules of justice are misapplied; and it is not only weakness, but great presumption to say these rules are in any case transgressed, because it is a point in which human reason cannot judge. Whoever therefore enters into this complaint may certainly say with the Psalmist, 'It is my infirmity.'

The miseries of which good men have a share in all public calamities will fall under the next head, which relates to the private and particular sufferings of good men.

These complaints must be considered as made by others in behalf of those who suffer; or as made by the sufferers themselves. When others make this complaint in behalf of the sufferers, they evidently assume a fact for which they can have no proof, that the sufferers are innocent righteous persons; and therefore it is great weakness and infirmity in them to complain against Providence, on supposition of a fact of which they cannot possibly judge.

The characters of men, in the eye of the world, depend

on their outward behavior; and when men behave so as to deserve a good character, it is great want of candor and charity to suspect them of evil: to treat them as deserving ill would be a direct violation of common justice: for since we have no way of judging men but by their outward conduct, to treat those ill who appear to us to deserve well, is acting against the only rule we have to direct us in the administration of justice. But when we judge of God's dealing with men, and call him to account for his justice, this rule, by which we are bound to judge and direct ourselves, is a very unsafe one to follow, and may easily misguide us: the reason is, because, though we must take men's characters from the only rule we have to go by, their external behavior, yet their true and real character, as to virtue and vice, is determinable only by their inward principles and sentiments, which are known to God alone, 'who searcheth the hearts and reins.' To judge men to be wicked because we see they are miserable, would be acting without charity towards men: to judge them to be innocent, and therefore unjustly treated when they suffer, would be acting with great presumption towards God. From which two considerations, the rule of our duty in these cases must appear to be this, to treat men as they appear to us to deserve, whether they are fortunate or unfortunate in the world; and forbear all censures on divine Providence, which acts by rules of the highest justice, though undiscoverable by us in particular cases.

But farther, the man who suffers may be what you take him to be, a very good man; and yet his sufferings no just occasion for any complaint on his behalf. One good man saw this and confessed it in his own case, 'It is good for me that I was afflicted: before I was in trouble I went astray.' Even good men in this life want sometimes admonitions to awaken their care, sometimes trials to perfect their faith. And unless you can judge certainly (which most certainly you cannot do) of the end and purposes of Providence in permitting a good man to suffer, you can never, with any pretence of reason, pass judgment on the ways of God.

As this is true with respect to the temporary sufferings of the righteous; so is it likewise true, even when the righteous are given up to destruction in this world, and perish, in the eyes of

the world, miserably. Consider the case of all the martyrs who have died for the testimony of God's truth: do you esteem them as good men given up by God, without mercy, to sundry kinds of cruel death? If you do not, it is evident that good men may suffer, even to death, without any just reflexion on the goodness of God.

The truth of the case is this; since all men must die, in the time and manner of death the difference cannot be great: and how hard soever it may be to reconcile ourselves to death, to unnatural and violent death especially; yet, on the strictest scrutiny of reason, it can be no loss to a good man, if there be any truth in religion, to be removed at any time out of this world into a better. And this will account for the case of the righteous, supposed to suffer in the destruction of a wicked nation: they fall indeed like other men; but they fall into the hands of God, who knows how to distinguish their case and to compensate all their miseries. I am not recommending these kind of sufferings to your liking, or trying to reconcile your natural sentiments to them: this only I contend for, that, on principles of reason and religion, no objection can lie against divine Providence on their account. But to proceed:

When the sufferer complains in his own behalf, where is the man who will venture to put his complaint into this form, that a righteous man is suffering unjustly? We pray daily to God 'not to enter into judgment with us;' and, I think, no man will care to begin, and enter into judgment with God: before he does, he must satisfy himself in these particulars; that he has been guilty of no offence to deserve the punishment of sufferings; that he is so perfect as not to want the admonition of them; that he is so approved as to want no trial.

Whoever can come to think of himself in this manner will not say of his own complaint, 'It is my infirmity;' but if the rest of the world say no worse of him, they will deal very tenderly by him.

I have now gone through the general cases which fall under my subject: as to the suspicions about Providence and the care of God over us, which have in them a mixture of religious melancholy, they are of another consideration. They are indeed great infirmities, often they are great bodily infirmities,

and deserve all the compassion and assistance that can be given. But these disorders do not usually break out into objections against Providence, but rather turn on the sufferers themselves, who are apter to judge hardly of themselves than of God; and if they despair of mercy, it is because they think themselves unworthy of it. They belong not therefore to the present subject.

To conclude: you see how dangerous it is to sit in judgment on God, and to censure the methods of his government: in every government particular cases have their particular reasons: those who know the reasons and circumstances of each case, may know whether the general rules of justice and equity are properly applied in the judgment and determination of the case. Others cannot possibly judge, though perhaps in the general rules of justice they may be well skilled. If this be true in human government, it must needs hold more strongly in the government of God. One man may see what another man can see, and therefore may be capable of judging when he does right or wrong: but no man can see all that God sees, and therefore no man is qualified to pass judgment on particular acts of Providence, which depend on circumstances out of the reach of human eyes. The great works of God which are before us, if duly attended to, declare his wisdom, goodness, and power; and the voice of nature, in all her works, speaks in the language of the wise king, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.' Happy are they who listen to this still voice! they will act not only the safest, but the most rational part; whilst others, full of themselves and their own wisdom, are daily condemning what they do not understand: and if ever they recover their right reason, the first step must be to see their weakness, and to join with the Psalmist in his humble confession, 'It is my own infirmity.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXVI.

PSALM XCIV.—VERSE 19.

It is shown that the two versions of the text give light to each other, as well as that each expresses the sense of the original. *The multitude of sorrows* mentioned in one translation must be peculiar to men of reflexion, since they are called in the other *the multitude of thoughts.* We learn that there are such sorrows from the words of the Preacher, Eccl. i. 18. If we follow his train of thought, and view the life of man under all its circumstances, every step we take will yield a proof of his proposition, &c. But there is no end to such inquiries, nor much reason for them. Those who possess common understanding and common sense, must see and feel the evils that are in the world. The distemper then is plain; but who can cure it? The wisest men in all ages have endeavored without success to find a remedy: but yet the world is not the happier for their inquiries. The futility of their suggestions shown, who advise us to lay hold on the pleasures of life, or to rise above pain and sorrow, as though they were but phantoms of the imagination. We are not however to despair; there is still one remedy for us, unknown to philosophers, and unsought by sensualists: and this we learn from the words of the text. The plain meaning of this is, that religion is our only real support against all human evils: with this no state of life is insupportable, and without it no condition is tolerable. The truth of this assertion examined. There are some natural evils from which no circumstances of life can deliver us: such is the fear of death, which is common to all, and never forsakes us.

Divest a man of all the hopes of religion, and of confidence in God, and what has he to mitigate or lessen this evil? If there be any pleasure in the idea of annihilation, it must arise from some very unnatural cause. This cause is sin, which by making men afraid of judgment, makes them willing to compound to be nothing: this is not curing the fear of death; but is choosing death from dread of a much greater evil. Death does not cease to be a natural evil; nor does the fear of it vanish, when men hope to die for ever rather than come to judgment. Irreligion therefore is a support against the *fear of guilt*, but none against the fear of death. Supposing the unbeliever to be clear of all guilt which may create a fear of future judgment, what comfort has he against the natural fear of death? Exhorting him to cast away all thoughts of death, is but bidding him not to see what is before him; and if blindness and want of thought are securities against the natural evils of life, we must cease to be men, and to exercise our faculties, before we can lose the sense of these evils. When persons reason thus, they confess that they must destroy the man to cure the distemper; and thus they prove either the physician a fool, or the evil incurable. Which of the two is the true case will appear when we consider whether religion affords a proper remedy against this evil or no. Since death is inevitable, this world can afford no cure for the apprehension of it: the fear of it can be allayed by nothing but the hope of living again; and this is the very hope which religion holds out to us. The man who believes in God and his attributes, cannot suppose that a Being so excellent sent him into the world merely to pass a few years in misery, or merely to live in perpetual fear of going out of it again. Though mortality is common to all creatures, the fear of death is peculiar to man; and this fear, if it serves no purpose beyond this world, would render our condition worse than that of the brutes which perish, and would lead us to suppose that man alone was

created for misery. The creatures made for this world have such fears only as are necessary for their preservation in it; but man, ordained to eternal life, has such desires of life and fears of death, as are necessary to preserve to him that immortality for which he was created, and to lead him to wean himself from the world, and look out for a more certain abiding place. This is the language of God, speaking to us by the fears and hopes of nature: these the comforts that refresh the soul in the multitude of thoughts which distract it. But does not this hope bring with it a great increase of fear? for though the unbeliever may sometimes shrink at the thoughts of death, the believer has the terror of damnation and the consciousness of sin for ever in his sight. This allowed, which is the happier man? Though there is no comparison between the fear of temporal and of eternal death, we are to consider that men cannot prevent this fear of a judgment to come. The irreligious man, though he may lose all hopes of futurity by his irreligion, cannot thereby get rid of the terrors and apprehensions of it; whilst the fear of the religious man, though he may often have reason to fear, is yet a symptom of health; for it leads him to repentance, and to put his trust in God. The religious man, if he fears, must blame himself, and not his religion. The fear of death arises from nature, is common to all, and admits of no cure but through religion. The condition of human life considered, it is shown that we must look beyond this world for solid happiness, and that the only true remedy against the ills of life is a sense of religion, and of the power and goodness of God: possessing which, we shall look with calmness on the calamities of the world, and with pleasure into the scenes of futurity. These are the comforts which, in the multitude of surrounding sorrows, will refresh the soul. As the comforts arising from true religion are our only true support, so the loss of them frequently occasions despair, which is of two kinds: the one has God for its object, but considers him as

an all-powerful revengeful being, devoid of mercy; or thinks of itself as a vessel of wrath doomed to destruction: the other, judging hastily from the disorders and afflictions of the world, concludes that there is no God, or that he regards none of these things. The extreme wretchedness of these conditions shown and compared; compared also with the comforts arising from a trust and confidence in God. Two conclusions drawn from what has been said: first, as the evils of life force us to resort to the comforts of religion, they are proofs of God's goodness to us, and agreeable to the wise ends of his Providence; warning us not to set up our rest here, but to remember God, and keep a steadfast eye on the things he has prepared for those who love him: secondly, since the evils of life cannot be avoided, and can only be cured by the help of religion, what a sad choice we make when we throw from us its comforts. If we add to the terrors of death by renouncing the hopes of futurity, our condition even in this world will be deplorable. The comforts of religion can alone give a relish to the pleasures of this life, and enable us to bear manfully its afflictions. As in the *multitude of our thoughts* we shall find a multitude of sorrows, let us therefore keep God our friend, *whose comforts will refresh our souls.*

DISCOURSE XXVI.

PSALM XCIV.—VERSE 19.

In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.

The old translation renders it thus:

In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart, thy comforts have refreshed my soul.

THESE versions, as they both very well express the sense of the original, so they give light to each other. 'The multitude of sorrows,' mentioned in one translation, must be the sorrows, in some sort, peculiar to the men of thought and reflexion; since in the other they are called, 'the multitude of thoughts.' That there are such sorrows, we learn from one who was himself a man of great thought: 'In much wisdom,' says the Preacher, 'is much grief; and he that increaseth knowlege, increaseth sorrow.' If we follow the train of thought which he has marked out, and view the life of man under all the various circumstances incident to it, every step we take will yield a proof of his proposition, every discovery will bring its torment, when we find, 'that all the days of man are sorrows, and his travel grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night.'

But there is no end of such inquiries; and indeed not much reason for them: we may sit still, and our own experience will bring this knowlege home to us, without giving us the trouble of looking abroad into the world to find it. Cares and anxieties

will make their way to us, though our doors are guarded within and without. We need only have common understanding to see the evil that is in the world; and we must want common sense, if we feel no share of it ourselves.

The distemper then is plain: but who is he that can cure it? who can administer a remedy sufficient to the evil, and give ease to a heart oppressed with sorrows, and weighed down with a multitude of tormenting thoughts? To find a cure for the evils of life has employed the thoughts of the wisest men in all ages; and the employment was worthy of all their care: but yet the world is where it was, nothing happier for their inquiries; still complaining, still calling out for help, and finding none. Some bid us lay hold of the good things of the world, and open our hearts to the pleasures of life. Wholesome advice! but where are the good things to be purchased, the use of which they prescribe? What merchant can furnish us with sincere pleasures, and ease of mind which knows no grief? Others bid us be above pain and sorrow, and call strongly on our reason to reject these phantoms of the imagination, which can have no effect on a wise man. A hard lesson! for though the master may forget common sense whilst he is teaching, yet the scholar will find it hard to forget it when it comes to feeling. What must we do then? Must we give ourselves up to despair, and as a prey to the calamities of life? No: one remedy there still is, unknown to the wisdom of Greece, unsought for by the men of this world, capable of administering pleasure and delight to our minds, amidst all the uncertainties and vexations that surround us. What this is you may learn from the words of the text, 'Thy comforts have refreshed my soul.'

The plain meaning of this is, that religion, or a just sense of our relation to God, is the only real and solid support against the many evils of life: this is our sheet-anchor; with this no state of life is insupportable; without it no condition is tolerable.

Give me leave to examine before you the truth of this assertion.

Some evils there are which are natural, which are born with us, and from which no circumstances or condition of life can

ever deliver us. Such is the fear of death : it is a fear common to young and old, to master and servant, king and subject : it arises with the first dawnings of reason, and continues with us to its last decay : it lives with us when we are poor, and forsakes us not when we are rich : it embitters the misery of the oppressed, and corrupts the pleasures of the mighty. We bring with us into the world such an aversion to the going out of it, that, to speak in the language of Scripture, 'through fear of death we are all our life-time subject to bondage.'

Now take religion out of the case, and divest a man of all hopes and confidence in God, and what has he to mitigate or lessen this evil? You will ask perhaps, what has he to fear from death, if God be out of the question, and there be no expectation of a judgment to come? Is it then so easy a thing to reconcile ourselves to the prospect of being nothing? Is it an adequate cure for the fear of death, to be certain that we shall die without hope, and be no more for ever? Nature, we are sure, abhors this prospect; and if there be in it any pleasure, it must arise from some very unnatural cause; and so it always does. It is sin that makes men afraid of judgment, and the fear of judgment makes them willing to compound to be nothing. But this is not curing the fear of death, but it is choosing death out of dread of a much greater evil : it is flying for protection to death to avoid the terrors of judgment, as men leap out of a window when the house is on fire; which is not despising the fall, but dreading the flame. It is not a remedy which reason would choose, but which it cannot tell how to avoid. When we prefer a less evil to a greater, the nature of things is not altered by our choice ; the evil we choose continues to be an evil, not eligible in itself, but only in respect of a greater evil to be avoided. The man who submits to have a leg cut off to save his life, does not think the losing of a limb to be a desirable thing, though he may be willing to part with a limb to save his life. By the same reason death does not cease to be a natural evil, nor does the natural fear of it vanish, when men hope to die for ever, rather than come to judgment. It shows, indeed, that they fear damnation more than death; but it never can show that they have not the same natural aversion to death which others have. This comfort, therefore,

this only comfort, which irreligion affords, is indeed no support at all against the natural fear of death: if any thing, it is a support against the fear of guilt, but no support against the fear of death. For suppose the man who believes nothing of the being of God, to be however a man of moral virtue, and clear of all guilt which may create a fear of future judgment, what comfort have you to give such an one against the natural aversion to death? Death will deliver him from nothing, and therefore he can have no hope in it: it will rob him of himself, of every thing; and unless he be so unnatural as to have no regard for himself, or any thing else, the prospect of it must be a constant uneasiness to him. Will you bid him steel his mind against these apprehensions, and resolutely cast all thoughts of death behind him? What is this but exhorting him not to exercise his reason on a subject which of all others most nearly concerns him? And is this a proper instruction to a reasonable creature? It is bidding men not see what is before them; as if blindness were a security against danger, and want of thought a cure for the natural evils of human life: which, if it be indeed the case, plainly shows that we must cease to be men, and to exercise the faculties of men, before we can lose the sense of these evils. Such, therefore, as reason in this manner, confess themselves unable to cure the evils of life: since they are forced to destroy the man to get rid of the distemper; a practice which must prove either the physician to be a fool, or the evil to be incurable. Which of the two is the true case, will appear when we consider whether religion affords a proper remedy against this evil or no.

Since death is inevitable, this world can afford no cure for the apprehensions of it; nothing on this side the grave can calm these fears of nature: riches and honors are not worth mentioning in this question; even the wisdom of the world, and all the solemn lectures of philosophy against the fear of death, are but like cordials given to criminals before execution, which lessen their fears only in proportion as they weaken their sense and understanding. Since then we must necessarily die, the fear of death can be allayed by nothing but the hope of living again: if we can have any good grounds on which we may entertain this hope, it is evident what an alteration it

makes in the case: death is no longer the same thing; it is a sleep, from which we expect to wake to immortality; it is a step from a life of misery to a life of peace and pleasure, attended with no fears but what are swallowed up in the blessed expectation of eternity. This is the very hope which religion affords. The man who believes in God, and has a trust and confidence in his power, wisdom, and goodness, sees manifold reason to believe that God made him for better purposes, than to live a few years on this stage in misery and affliction: he cannot suppose that a Being of such excellency of wisdom and goodness sent him into the world merely to live in perpetual fears of going out of it again. All the visible works of nature are liable to decay and dissolution; and in that we are mortal, we are akin to all things round us: but then, of all the works of God, man alone lives in continual apprehensions of his dissolution: the material world is void of sense, and therefore void of fear; the brutes have so much fear of present danger, as is necessary to their preservation; but remove from them immediate danger, and they show no signs of the fear of death. This fear therefore, which is peculiar to man, if it serves no purpose beyond this world, is an additional misery, which makes the condition of man to be worse than that of the brute which perishes. What shall we say then? that God has made all things perfect in their kind, and suited to their natural enjoyments; and created man only for misery and affliction? God forbid. The truth is, that the creatures, made for this world, have such fears only as are necessary for their preservation in this world: but man, ordained to eternal life, has such desires of life, such fears of death implanted in him, as are necessary to preserve to him that immortality to which he is created: these fears of death are perpetual calls to him, to secure to himself that life which shall never fail; they are constant intimations to him to wean himself from this world, which will so soon fail, and to look out for a more certain abiding place. This is the language of God, speaking to us by the fears and the hopes of nature; these are the comforts which refresh the soul in the multitude of thoughts which distract it.

But does not this hope, you will say, bring with it a great increase of fear? The man who lives without God may shrink

sometimes at the thoughts of death, and the apprehensions of falling into nothing: but the believer has a much greater terror, even the terror of damnation, to alarm every fear and suspicion of his soul, and to keep him on a perpetual rack. He lives in a state of insecurity; perfect he is not, but often sins; and every sin refreshes all his fears, and places the awful Judge, armed with anger and vengeance, full in his sight. Put this into his scale, and see which is the happier man, he who has only natural death to fear, or he who fears damnation also.

True it is, there is no comparison between the fear of temporal death and of death eternal: 'Fear not them,' says our Saviour, 'who can only kill the body, but fear him who can cast both body and soul into hell-fire:' a plain intimation, were any intimation wanting in so plain a case, that there is no comparison to be made between the fears. But then it must be considered that the hopes and fears of futurity are not things of our own invention; they will not come at our calling, and go at our bidding; for men hardly fear death itself more naturally, than they do a judgment to come: and the difference between a religious man and an irreligious man does not lie in this, that one fears a future judgment, and the other fears it not; for, commonly speaking, both fear it, and he the most who has least religion. It is no unusual thing for men to deny God in their actions, who confess him in their fears and apprehensions: and the bravery of irreligion consists more in hiding these fears from the world, than in being able to throw them out of the mind. This being the case, it is very evident that the natural fear of death is very much heightened by the fears of futurity; which are very corroding and exasperating, where there are no hopes to mitigate and allay them: and this is the irreligious man's case; he loses all the hopes of futurity by his irreligion, but cannot get rid of the terrors and apprehensions of it. And though the religious man may often have reason to fear, yet even his fear is a symptom of health, and is working towards the repentance not to be repented of: 'for the Lord is his refuge, and God is the strength of his confidence.'

But suppose the religious man to be surrounded with the fears of futurity, if he has reason for his fears he must blame himself, and not his religion: religion wants not its comforts,

however some who have a sense of religion may, possibly, be too wicked to be capable of any. Be this as it will, certain it is, that the fear of death arises from nature, and is common to all; but admits of no cure but from the comforts and consolations which religion administers. But to proceed:

There are many other evils and calamities in life, which prove daily occasions of sorrow and affliction to us; so many they are, that it would be endless to enumerate them: these are so constantly near us, and do so often overtake us, that a wise man would, if it be possible, always be provided with a remedy. In private life we suffer often unexpectedly in our fortune, in the loss of acquaintance, friends and relations, and find ourselves bereaved of those comforts of life which were our greatest enjoyments; and not only so, but given up a prey to sorrow and vexation of spirit. What shall we do in this case? where shall we look out for ease? The world has little pity, and yet less help for such sufferers: much less help still has it for those, who are seemingly fortunate and prosperous, and live surrounded with plenty and abundance, but are secretly unhappy, restless and dissatisfied in their minds, and utterly void of that inward peace which is the only source of pleasure. Thousands there are of this sort, who possess all the world can give, and yet have nothing to enjoy. Others, though they have nothing to disquiet them at present, and have all they wish for, have yet an heart to torment themselves, by raising sad prospects at a distance, and bringing within their view all the calamities which a warm imagination can represent. Consider now on what foot you will place human happiness: take the good things of the world, divide them as you please, and try how many you can make easy. You will soon see some employing your gifts in the purchase of vice and distempers; and growing extremely miserable, by having these means of happiness put into their hands. Some you will see worn out with the care and anxiety of preserving, others tormented with losing their share; some restless and uneasy, whose minds no outward fortune can cure; some fearful and suspicious, with whom no peace can dwell; and all, perhaps, secretly dissatisfied with the prosperous condition in which you have placed

them. If this be the condition of human life, and that it is every day's experience bears witness, we must look out for something more solid and lasting than this world affords, if ever we mean to be happy in it: we must find that thing, whatever it is, that can preserve us, in the midst of plenty, from being undone by the allurements and temptations of the world; that can secure our peace against the casualties of fortune, and the torments which the disappointments of the world bring with them; that can save us from the cares and solicitudes which attend on large possessions, and give us a mind capable of relishing the good things before us; easy and satisfied as to the present, secure and void of fear as to the future. And what is this remedy? and who is he that can supply it? He only it is who is the Author of every good and perfect gift; whom to know and to love, is a perpetual spring of joy and felicity. The man who enjoys the world under a sense of religion, and of the power and goodness of God, will so use the world as not to abuse it; will look on the uncertainties of life with the unconcernedness of a man who knows he has a much nobler possession, of which no one can rob him: he will part with his riches without torment, he will keep them without anxiety, and use them so as to make them a blessing to himself and all around him. If the course of the world be disordered, and threatens the inhabitants thereof with calamity and distress, he will maintain his inward peace, knowing that 'the Lord is King, be the earth ever so unquiet:' he will look with pleasure into all the scenes of futurity, being well assured, that the world that now is, and the world that is to come, are in the hands of God. These are the comforts which, in the multitude of sorrows which surround us, will refresh the soul of a religious man, whilst they who forget God are spending a wretched life in lamenting over the misfortunes of this world, and are ending it to begin a more wretched life in the world that is to come.

As the comforts flowing from a true sense of religion are the only true support of the spirit of a man, in all circumstances and condition; so the loss of them is frequently attended with a misery, of all others the sharpest, and which the mind of man can least bear. We call this misery by the name of despair:

a grief it is which pierces through the soul, and racks it in every part. There are two sorts of it. One has God for its object, but God clothed in anger and vengeance; it has no trust or confidence in him; it is all fear and dread, as living under a Being supposed to want no power, and to have no mercy; or thinking itself incapable of all mercy, as a vessel of wrath, fitted to destruction: the other disbelieves the being of a God, or his providence and care over his creatures; it sees the world in disorder and confusion, the righteous afflicted, the wicked in great prosperity, and hastily concludes 'that there is no God,' or that he regards none of these things: a conclusion which either fills our hearts with all the pains of desponding melancholy, seeing ourselves surrounded with innumerable troubles, and no helping hand near to lend us assistance; or else makes them obdurate and 'fully set to do evil,' seeing the prosperity of the wicked, and none near to call them to account. Need I now add any thing to show the wretchedness of these conditions? Is it not a miserable state to live in a world where no justice is to be expected; to struggle not only with the accidents of life, but with the wickedness of men, with the violence of the oppressor, with the fraud of the deceitful, with the envy of the malicious, and with the jealousies and suspicions of all about us? to have all our hopes and expectations confined within this narrow scene of wickedness and confusion, and no power to overrule this disorder, no hand to guide us through the storm? Is it not still more wretched to live under the constant dread of an incensed power; in daily expectation of the time shortly to come, which will deliver us up to his wrath; a wrath which no repentance can appease, no tears can soften? No imagination can form to itself a misery exceeding this.

These are the sorrows to which we are exposed, when once we let go our trust and confidence in God, and render ourselves incapable of his comforts. As long as we have hope in God, we see our way through the world, and move within sight of a sure haven of rest and peace: if the wicked prosper, we know there is a day of account; if the righteous suffer, we know his reward is not far off: if all things about us seem disturbed, we know whose word can bring order out of confusion: whatever

our state and condition are, we possess our souls in patience, and in full assurance that all things are subject to him who is our God and our Redeemer.

I shall detain you no longer than to lay two consequences before you, arising from what has been said. First, since the evils of life do so necessarily force us to have resort to the comforts of religion, being capable of no other cure or remedy, it may show us some marks of God's goodness and care of us, even in his permitting these many evils in the world: they are so many calls to us to search out and secure to ourselves that real happiness to which we are ordained. Had we been made for this world only, it would be impossible to imagine a reason, why a Being of infinite goodness should place us in the midst of so many fears and sorrows: but as we are formed for a more lasting state than this, and are placed here for our trial only, it was necessary and agreeable to the wise ends of Providence to surround us on all sides with warnings not to set up our rest here, but to remember, and with all our might to labor for the life that shall never perish. To this end the evils of the world are very subservient; they are diffused through all conditions of life, and are calls to persons of all conditions to remember God in all their ways, and to keep a steadfast eye on the things 'which God has prepared for those who love him.'

Secondly, since the evils of life cannot be avoided, nor yet be cured without the helps and assistances which religion alone can afford; let us consider what a sad choice we make for ourselves, when we throw from us the hopes and comforts which flow from a due acknowlegement of God. If we have hope in this life only, we must be miserable. We are born to misery, and we must die to be happy. But if we add to the terrors of death, by renouncing or forfeiting all hopes of futurity; if we corrupt the few pleasures of life by the fears of guilt, and give weight and sharpness to all our other afflictions, by a fearful looking for of judgment to come; our condition, even in this world, will be deplorable, and our life but one continued scene of hopeless misery. As we value therefore even the pleasures of this life, and our share in the good things of the world, which the providence of God has placed before us, let

us keep ourselves in a capacity of enjoying them, by holding fast the comforts of religion. These only can give us a true relish of our pleasures; these only can enable us to bear like men our share of evil and affliction: our hearts will often be disquieted within us, and we shall, 'in the multitude of our thoughts,' find a multitude of sorrows: let us therefore keep God our friend, 'whose comforts will refresh our souls.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXVII.

PSALM LXXXVIII.—VERSE 15.

PART I.

As the comforts of true religion are our only support against the calamities of the world, so the terrors of religion, exclusive of these comforts, add weight to all our miseries. But these terrors do not spring naturally from religion; for it is much easier to believe that all we see is chance, than that an all-wise, all-powerful Being has formed us to be miserable, and given us a knowlege of himself that we may live in perpetual fear and distraction: yet this is often the case. Many are rendered unhappy by such fears, which, of all those that are incident to man, are most to be dreaded, and are, as the Psalmist says, *distraction.* A man in this sad state employs his time in finding reasons to justify his fears, and rejects every argument advanced for his consolation. This evil is the more to be lamented, because even virtue and innocence are not always a security against it, but on the contrary, make us sometimes think ourselves worse than we are. But this wretched state, in which we sustain at once the burden of the righteous as well as of the wicked, is not always the worst of the case; for those who are thus severe with themselves, God will one day judge justly and righteously; whereas there are others who, not being able to bear these fears, desert religion altogether, and imagining themselves not good enough to obtain its rewards, do all they can to deserve its punishments. This is the case of those who drown their apprehensions of futurity in vice and intemperance; also in some measure of those who harden their minds

against a sense of religion, and reject the belief of a God. This latter irreligious phrenzy is the greater of the two, and more fatal in its consequences: for the weak man who fears God more than he ought, is more worthy of compassion than the bold man who despises him.

In every view the effects of these religious terrors afford us but a melancholy prospect: were they the natural effects of true religion, religion itself would be distraction, and not the reasonable service of a reasonable creature: unless we imagine that he who made us, takes a pleasure in seeing us lose our reason and understanding. The several kinds of these terrors, as well as their real causes, shown; also the true cure for them pointed out, and shown to arise from the following sources: I. from uncertainty in religion: or, II. from false notions of God, and of the honor and worship due to him: or, III. from a conscience wounded with a sense of guilt: or, lastly, from some accidental infirmities of mind or body. If there be any of the human race so degenerate as to be void of all sense of religion, they are evidently out of the question: but there are many whose minds are disturbed with a perpetual variety of opinions, like a ship tossed in a tempestuous sea. The concern which every man has in the issue of true religion, is too great to be left to chance and uncertainty: the question is, whether we shall die like the beasts that perish, or rise to immortality. If a man holds his mind in doubt, he divests himself of all the hopes and comforts of religion, and its fears and terrors take possession of his heart; every thought of which, laboring under such uncertainty, deprives him of all present joy, and gives him no assurance of any hereafter. None can long endure this state, and all hasten to deliver themselves from these torments by various ways; some by flying to business or pleasure; others by forcing themselves to fix on some peculiar choice; and thus some reject all religion, and some take all, without being able to give a reason for what they do. But all these methods, being artificial and

without foundation, are overturned by the storms of life, and end in destruction. Let the man who has shut out of his mind all thought and reflexion, be but awakened from his lethargy, and all his fears and terrors will return with double force; and he will find that his attempt to deliver himself from the uncertainties of religion, has deprived him of its hopes and comforts only. So again, the mind of the unbeliever, if he meets with any shock to disturb his peace, will return to its natural state. Whoever in the great concerns of life neglects to consult reason, will ultimately find his reason return, and his second state much worse than the first. The question is, not whether those who prefer religion, notwithstanding all their doubts, are in a safe way, but how they are affected by its fears and terrors. The varieties in this case are so great and many, that the same considerations will not apply to all. Some may believe the being of a God and his providence, but have doubts as to their own state hereafter: this is the best of this case; here religion is all labor without any benefit; and no man who does not think it certain of a future reward, finds any security in it; neither does he meet with any remedy against the natural fear of death, or consolation against the evils and afflictions of life. A man cannot have a true and just notion of God under this persuasion. While men are at ease in their worldly affairs, they may find some satisfaction in this kind of belief; but distress will shake them, and their religion will be void of comfort.

But the worst of this case is, that when men are religious from fear, they carry their fears with them even to the grave. Not so when religion arises from a just notion of God; for then every act of it is followed by a contentment which nothing can disturb. He who is religious, not because he knows it is right for him to be so, but because he dreads to be otherwise, is apt to fall into superstition. Hence we see that some who are most devoutly disposed, are under a perpetual uneasiness of mind. Others, seeing them in this state, conclude that religion is bur-

densome, and remain satisfied without inquiring into it: it is not easy to determine which is the wiser of the two. The religious man fears God because he knows that, as a wise, just, and good Father, he ought to be feared. *His* fear is full of love and reverence; but the fear of the superstitious man is what the Psalmist calls *distraction.*

Hence we see how unsuccessful all these attempts are to cure the fears which arise from doubts in religion. What is to be done then? God has given us reason, and provided the manifold works of nature and providence for its employment. The inquiry into the visible things of God will guide us by a sure clue to the acknowlegement of their invisible Author, and afford us a cure for those terrors which are apt to seize on unsettled minds. The man who thus acquires a just notion of God and his attributes, will find his way to peace, be the darkness about him ever so thick. It is in vain to seek for satisfaction till we know God, and can say in our hearts, *We know in whom we have trusted.* This will make our religion become an holy and reverential fear, unmixed with terror or confusion, and making us wise unto salvation.

II. False notions of God, and of the honor and worship due to him, are another source of religious terror. What has been already said proves how destructive the former are to the peace of mankind; and the latter being derived from these false notions, the same observations are applicable to it: this indeed may be illustrated by historical evidence; viz. the sacrifice of children by their parents in the heathen world, and pilgrimages or processions in the modern; as well as by those unnatural mortifications practised and recommended in some parts of the Christian church. All these are marks of a slavish fear, and of a religion of terror. To this head may be referred the terrors of those who are disappointed in their expectations of worldly success, when they enter the service of God. One who resolves to be good, expects to be prosperous; and if any

calamity befalls him, he thinks himself forsaken by God, and all his comforts vanish. Another having fallen into distress, applies to God by prayer; and if he meets with no deliverance, he falls into the same fears, like the Psalmist, who said, *I have cried day and night before thee. Why castest thou off my soul?* &c.

Such persons neither seek nor admit a remedy; but giving themselves up to despair, think they make a sacrifice to God. If true religion taught us to expect temporal prosperity in the service of God, we should rightly ascribe our sufferings to it: but as it does not do so, we ought not to charge God foolishly, and call that unfaithfulness in him, which is in fact the weakness and folly of man.

Now these terrors being difficult of cure, inasmuch as they are not approachable to reason and advice, it is the more incumbent on us to guard against them before they come. As we ought in all conditions of life to limit our hopes and expectations within the bounds of probability; so the same rule should be observed in religion. We ought never to expect more from God than he has expressly promised, or than he may consistently grant. If we exceed these bounds, religion will become our torment, and not our comfort: but *we*, and not religion, will be to blame. We should consider that our afflictions are trials, and therefore that God will not relieve us from them at our request. In the great end, the salvation of our souls, we can only be disappointed by our own fault. This is our true comfort, and is sufficient to support us under present evils, and to relieve us from the fears of the life to come.

Conclusion: we see that religion, though it may afford an occasion, is not the cause of these terrors. If it be said, that, if there were no sense of religion, there could be no such terrors, we answer, it is equally true that, were there no reason, there would be no such apprehensions; but we do not blame God for giving us reason: let us not then blame him for giving us reli-

gion; but let us use our reason to search after and know him, and then religion will be our comfort; and we shall be able to say to ourselves, and declare to others, *her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

PART II.

Two other kinds of religious terrors, with their causes, remain to be considered: firstly, those of guilt, which can alone pretend to be consonant to true notions of religion, and to derive themselves justly from it. If there be any truth in religion, it is certain *that God will judge the world in righteousness*, &c. As this belief in virtuous and pious men is attended with peace of mind, so does it necessarily produce *tribulation and anguish in every soul that doth evil:* this point enlarged on. The power of conscience is seen in all men: when we offend wilfully against our sense of good and evil, this never ceases to torment us with the apprehension of future misery, though nature has not furnished us with a distinct knowlege of what that misery will be. These natural fears of conscience are also rational fears: some natural fears may be overcome or lessened, as that of death by the comforts of religion: but the case is quite otherwise in the terrors of guilt; for the more we advise either with reason or religion, the more certain shall we be that they are no delusions. So hard is it to get rid of these terrors, that they grow too strong for all the assistance that can be administered; and when this is the case, the sinner becomes a woful spectacle: his days are without pleasure, and his nights without rest: his life is one scene of misery, and he lives only because he is afraid to die.

This misery being so great, no wonder that the invention of man has been racked to find a remedy. Natural conscience and reason make the connexion between guilt and fear: remove these, and the fears will cease: this then is one of the devices

of profligate sinners; and this method may do, while there is health and strength; but time will show the folly of it. Others, incapable of such impiety, give themselves up to excess of vice and intemperance, and find ease in losing their understanding and power of reflexion: dreadful are the terrors of guilt, which make men willing to forget themselves, that they may forget their fears! But these are unnatural methods, and which few only are capable of using: yet the case before us is a very general one. Let us then consider the more general and rational methods which have been approved for the cure of this evil: these are to be found in the several forms of religion which do or have prevailed in the world: it would be endless to enumerate all the particular methods: it is more important to inquire whether reason and natural religion can furnish a remedy or no.

All methods applicable to this purpose may be reduced to two heads; external rights, and internal acts of the mind. The first are to be found in great abundance in almost all parts of the world: how they came to be applied to the purposes of religion among the heathen nations is not easily accounted for: their impropriety and insufficiency fully shown. The sacrifices and oblations under the law of Moses were of divine institution; and whatever virtue they had in them, they had it in consequence of the institution, and the promise annexed to it; which is a point in which mere natural religion can have no concern. The inefficiency of heathen sacrifices dilated on. The religion of a sinner is an application for pardon; and is useless unless it can prescribe a proper method for obtaining it: the two attributes of God with which this religion is chiefly concerned, are his justice and mercy; let us suppose then (and it is the very truth) that these both meet in the rules of reason and equity; or that the judgments of God are righteous judgments, free from any weak inclination to mercy, or any rigorous affectation of justice. Now all that natural religion has to offer unto God

in behalf of a sinner, is the sorrow of his heart for what is past, and the purpose of his mind to sin no more. This case considered: sorrow for sin shown to be a very natural passion, but to have no virtue in it: it never was made part of a virtuous man's character, that he lived in fear of the gallows: besides, the generality of mankind are not philosophers; are not able to look back on their iniquities with such calmness and judgment as are necessary to create a just abhorrence of vice, and restore the pure love of God and virtue. In the case of all human governments, laws are fortified with penalties, that the fear of punishment may keep the subject from offending; but it is never imagined that all such as discover a fear of punishment shall be spared, after having incurred it by disobedience: how then should reason teach us to think it reasonable in God to do that which we do not think it right to do ourselves? It may be said that God can, though man cannot, distinguish between the mere fear of punishment and true sorrow for sin; admit this difference, and still the far greater number of sinners will be in a helpless state under natural religion.

The case of one who is thoroughly convinced of the iniquity of sin, and purposes to forsake it, considered. This supposes him to have sinned so as justly to deserve punishment: the question is, whether a sincere alteration of mind can give him security of a pardon: this shown at large not to be the case: misery and happiness are set before us on *some* terms; and it must be allowed reasonable for God to act on such terms as reason itself, the interpreter of his will, proposes to us: now we come into this world reasonable creatures; we find ourselves accountable for our behavior to God, our Maker and Judge: from which principles it follows that obedience to the moral law is the condition of salvation: how then can we come to the desired consequence, that he who has lived in disobedience shall be saved, if ever he becomes sensible of his sin and folly? Is this condition implied in any law in the universe? would it

be fit for God to propose?—would it not enervate all his laws? How then comes it fit for him to do that which it is unfit he should ever promise or profess? But you say, we depend on God's equity and goodness: where do you learn this equity?—how do you find it equitable that men should live by one rule and be judged by another?—how does reason teach us to think that God and his laws will be satisfied by our sinning and repenting? But, it may be said, pardon may be expected from a consideration of God's goodness, and our imperfection, weakness, and inability to pay a punctual obedience to his laws: this admitted, the most which it can assure us of is, that we shall be intitled to equitable allowances in the case of imperfect obedience.

On the whole, it does not appear that natural religion has any certain cure for the terrors of guilt: because, the title by obedience being forfeited, there are no certain principles of reason to show how far, and to what instances, God's mercy will extend; because we can have no certain assurance of ourselves that we are deserving of mercy; and because the whole matter is too refined to be of use to mankind in general. Hence the wisdom and goodness of God appears, by his proposing a safe and general method of salvation to sinners in the gospel of Christ, the sinner's great charter of pardon. Here then is a safe retreat for the guilty conscience: here God appears, and gives his own unalterable word for our security: here the Son of God is Mediator and high priest, to offer up and sanctify the sorrows of a contrite heart, and to bring down spiritual strength and comfort. After so much done for the security of sinners on God's part, it is lamentable that there should be any who are still incapable of comfort: yet such there are, of whom it was proposed to speak in the last place, whose religious fears arise from accidental disorders of mind or body: this case is not subject to reason, and therefore much cannot be said on it. Whatever be the union of soul and body, so united are they,

that the disorders of one often derive themselves from the other; instances given: hence some religious fears may be ascribed to the body, though properly they belong to the mind: many degrees of madness; among which a distempered mind on the subject of religious fear may sometimes be reckoned: such persons not chargeable with seeking false comfort, for it is a part of their disease to refuse all comfort: true comfort they are unable to receive: their terrors cannot be imputed as a blemish to religion.

DISCOURSE XXVII.

PSALM LXXXVIII.—VERSE 15.

While I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted.

PART I.

As the comforts which true religion affords are the only sure support against the evils and calamities of the world, to which every condition of life is more or less exposed; so the terrors of religion, being very grievous in themselves, exclusive of these comforts, add weight to all our miseries, and are a burden too heavy for the spirit of a man to sustain. But surely there is something monstrous in such terrors! They come not from religion by natural birth: for it is much easier to believe that all we see is chance and fortune, and religion itself a vain thing, than to believe that an all-wise, all-powerful Being has formed us to be miserable, and given us a sense and knowlege of himself, that we may live in perpetual terror and distraction. And yet, in fact, this is often the case: we see many rendered unhappy by such fears and jealousies; and of all the fears incident to man, these are the most fearful, and give us the quickest sense of misery; they are, what the Psalmist has described them to be, 'distraction.' A man in this sad state employs all his reason to his own destruction; he is sagacious in finding out new torment for himself, and can give a thousand reasons to justify his unreasonable fears; if you offer a thousand more for his comfort and consolation, he rejects them all: his mind is under so thick a cloud, that no ray of light can find admittance. This evil is the more to be lamented, because virtue and innocence are not always a security against it; nay, some-

times the very desire to be better than we are, and to render ourselves more acceptable to God, makes us think ourselves to be worse than we are, and quite out of his favor. What a wretched state is this! to sustain at once the burden of the righteous and of the wicked; to deny ourselves and the world for the sake of God, and yet to suffer under the sorest evils which can befall even the wicked in this life, the torments of a distracted mind!

But bad as this case is, it is not always the worst of the case; for as to such who suffer under these terrors, and yet retain their integrity, there is this comfort, which, whether they can receive it now or no, they will one day find, that however they deal with themselves, yet God will judge a righteous judgment; and for the sake of their innocence, deliver them from the fears of the guilty. But others there are, who, not able to bear these fears of religion, in the haste they make to run from them, leave religion itself behind them; and imagining that they cannot be good enough to obtain the rewards of religion, take effectual care to be bad enough to deserve the punishment of it. This is evidently their condition, who fortify themselves against the apprehensions of futurity by vice and intemperance; and seem to have no greater concern on them in this life, than to secure themselves from thought and reflexion. This may likewise, in some measure, be their case, who employ all their reason in hardening their minds against the sense of religion; who seem to think it an easier matter to arrive at peace, by rejecting the belief of a God, than to come to any reasonable terms with him, and to find comfort and security under the apprehensions of his power and majesty. This irreligious phrenzy is, of the two, the greatest; and will, in its consequences, be more fatal than the other. A weak man, who fears God more than he should do, may be worthy of compassion; but the bold man, who despises him, has no reason to expect any.

In whatever view we consider the effects of these terrors of religion, they afford us but a melancholy prospect: it is a sad thing to see the wicked desperate, or the righteous in despair. Were these terrors the natural effects of that fear of God which is the foundation of all true religion, religion itself would

be distraction, and not the reasonable service of a reasonable creature; unless you can imagine, that he who made us reasonable creatures, and distinguished us by the nobler faculties of the mind, can take pleasure in seeing us lose our reason and understanding.

But since these terrors do often assume the shape and form of religion, and are almost always charged to its account; it may be some service to true religion to show the several kinds of these terrors and the real causes of them: and it will be for our common instruction to consider, at the same time, the vanity of those remedies which men often have recourse to under these evils; and as far as the generality of the case will permit, to point out the true cure for them.

As to the causes and kinds of these terrors, they may be reduced, I think, to the following heads: they are such as arise, either, first, from uncertainty in religion; or, secondly, from false notions of God, and of the honor and worship due to him; or, thirdly, from a conscience wounded with a sense of guilt; or, lastly, from some accidental infirmities of mind or body.

It is a matter of doubt, whether there be any of the human race so absolutely degenerate as to be void of all sense of religion: that there are any such has not yet been proved, though the point has been much labored: but if any such there be, they are evidently out of the present question: for whatever anxieties may reach men in such a state of stupidity, they cannot be ascribed to religion, from the sense of which the sufferers are supposed to be exempted. But many there are whose minds are disturbed with perpetual variety of opinions, and enjoy no more rest than a ship left to the mercy of the winds in a tempestuous sea. The concern which every man has in the issue of religion, is too great to be submitted with indifference to chance and uncertainty: for the question before him is, whether he must die like the beasts that perish, or rise again to immortality; whether he is at liberty to pursue all his inclinations here without control; or whether he stands accountable to a judgment to come, to be held in his presence who is the Lord of life and death, and will recompense to every man the work which he hath done? If he holds his mind in doubt and sus-

pense as to this great event, he divests himself of all the hopes and comforts of religion, and leaves room for all its fears and terrors to take possession of his heart: for he can have no true joy in the prospect of the pleasures of another world, which, for aught he knows, may be all delusion; nor can he enjoy the pleasures of this world because of the fears of futurity, which, for aught he knows, may be all real, and approaching him every day. Every thought of the heart, laboring under such uncertainty, brings torment and vexation with it; it renders him incapable of all present joy, and gives no assurance of any to succeed. The man who is to cast lots for his life, is not more restless and uneasy under the expectation of what chance shall determine concerning him, than he is, whose mind is in suspense in the great points of religion; for these points have in them life and death eternal, and he lives under a perpetual expectation of a sudden determination of his fate: so that he is all his life-long casting lots for his life.

The uneasiness of this state is such, that no one can endure it long; and in experience it is true, that all hasten to deliver themselves from these torments one way or other. Some labor to shut out all thought and reflexion on these subjects; they fly to business or pleasure for refuge; and because business and pleasure have their seasons of remission, and leave the mind its vacant hours for consideration, they are forced to take shelter in vice and intemperance, as what alone can secure from the interruptions of thought and reason. Others, resolving to rescue themselves from the perplexities of an unsettled mind, use a kind of force on themselves in determining their choice, and resolutely fix on the post which they will maintain; and thus some reject all religion, and some take all, without being able, on either side, to give a reason for what they do.

But all these methods are but so many arts by which men deceive themselves, and gain a false peace, liable to be disturbed by new torments and anxieties: they build without a foundation; and when the winds and storms arise, their house will fall on their heads, and cover them in ruin and destruction. Let the man who has long shut out thought and reflexion, and through the power of vice and intemperance has arrived at his

much-desired state of stupidity; let him, I say, be but awakened out of this lethargy by some uncommon calamity; or let sickness and infirmity render him incapable of vice, and discharge those fetters with which his mind was bound; and all his fears will return with double force; they will appear no longer in the form of doubts and uncertainties, but will come on him as the terrors of guilt armed with vengeance; and he will soon find that the method he took to deliver himself from the uncertainties of religion, has delivered him from nothing but the hopes and comforts of it, and bound on his soul all its fears and terrors without remedy. So, again, if the man who is an unbeliever on the strength of his will, without the consent of his understanding, meets with any shock to disturb his ill-grounded peace, his mind will certainly recoil; and, like a spring, when the weight that held it is removed, return to its natural state. Whoever, in these great concerns of life, determines himself without asking advice of his reason, and taking the assent of his mind along with him, will certainly find, sooner or later, that reason will revenge the affront, and make him pay dear for neglecting so faithful a counsellor. And when such fears and uncertainties return, the second state is much worse than the first: for now they come attended with a consciousness of an obstinate and resolute opposition to God, of an endeavor to harden our hearts against all sense of religion; which, be religion true or false, no sense or reason can justify.

But what shall we say of such, who prefer religion notwithstanding all their doubts, who voluntarily submit to the duties of it, and choose even its uncertain hopes before the present pleasures of the world? Are not such in a safe way? I trust in God, many such are: but I must remind you that the question before us is not how safe they are, but how they are affected by the fears and terrors of religion. And even, as to this point, the varieties in this case are so many and great, that the same considerations will not reach all who are in this condition. Some there may be who believe the being of God and his providence, who see the difference between moral good and evil, and own all the obligations arising from thence on rational beings; but may doubt, perhaps, as to their own state

after this life, and whether God intends them for any thing beyond this world; and yet they may think it highly reasonable and becoming them to worship and obey God, as much as others, who have better and greater expectations from him for themselves. You have in this description the very best of this case before you; and yet, under these circumstances, religion is all labor and no benefit: for no man can be so blind as to think religion a sure way to worldly prosperity and happiness; and if it is not sure of a future reward, there is no security in it. Here is no remedy in such religion against the natural fear of death, to which all are subject; no consolation against the many evils and afflictions of life, from all of which none are free. When we are surrounded with difficulties and distress, this religion shows us not the way to escape, but gives us up to our present sufferings, void of better hopes and expectations; at least, uncertain of comfort or relief. Besides, how can a man possibly maintain a just and true notion of God under such a persuasion as this? We are sure the best men often have a portion of misery in this world; and if we are not persuaded that there is something better for them in reserve hereafter, it is impossible to justify to ourselves the goodness of God towards the children of men: and yet, without this, religion must be all terror, consisting in the belief of an absolute power over us, but a power not rendered amiable by goodness or mercy. While men are easy in the world, they may find some satisfaction in such a kind of belief, and value themselves perhaps for the submission they pay to God, without being solicitous what shall become of themselves; but distress will shake them, and the sorrows of the world will prove their religion to be void of comfort.

But the worst of this case is, when men resolve to be religious out of fear, and merely to secure themselves from some dreadful apprehensions which they have on their minds; such religion, as it begins in fear, so it lives perpetually in fear, and carries with it all its fears at least as far as the grave. When religion arises from a just notion of God, and from a right apprehension of what is due from a reasonable creature to his reasonable Maker and Governor, there is peace and satisfaction in every step of it; every act of reli-

gion carries with it the approbation of our own minds, and is followed by a contentment which nothing can disturb. But he who is religious, not because he knows it is right for him so to be, but because he dreads to be otherwise, can never know that he is right in any thing he does, but will naturally fall into all the methods of superstition, which some weak ones and some wise in this world agree to call religion. Hence it is that some, who seem most devoutly disposed, are under a perpetual uneasiness of mind, and never satisfied that they have done any thing as they ought to do. Others, seeing men of such application to the duties of religion under such anxious concern about it, conclude that religion is a most burdensome thing, and that the wisest way is to be contented without inquiring much after it. Whether they who make this conclusion, or they who administer occasion for it, are the wiser, is no easy matter to determine: certain it is, that the fear of God, which is the foundation of true religion, differs as much from these fears of ignorance and superstition, as one thing can well differ from another. The religious man fears God because he knows him; and therefore he fears him as a wise, just, good, and merciful Father and Judge ought to be feared: his fear is full of love and reverence, and has nothing dreadful in it, unless guilt and a wounded conscience arm it with unnatural terrors: but the superstitious man fears God, just as children and weak men fear spirits and apparitions; he trembles at the thought of him, he flies from he knows not what, seeks refuge he knows not where; and this hurry and confusion of mind he calls 'religion;' but the Psalmist has given it a better name, it is 'distraction.'

You see how unsuccessful all these attempts are to cure the fears which arise from doubts and uncertainties in religion: these remedies increase the distemper, and heighten the fear till it comes to be a phrenzy, and too strong to submit to the cure of reason and sober sense. What must be done then? Will you exhort us to cast away all doubts, and to be certain and positive in all points of religion? I know full well that this is no proper subject for exhortation; but I will exhort you to be diligent inquirers after God. That you have reason, you are apt enough to boast: that God has provided proper employ-

ment for your reason, the manifold works of nature and providence bear witness: these are the visible things of God, which will guide you by a sure clue to the acknowlegement of the invisible Author. And this inquiry, as it is the first in order of nature with regard to religious knowlege, so is it the first likewise with regard to the peace and comforts of religion: and it is with this view that I recommend this inquiry, as a cure for those terrors which are apt to seize on unsettled minds. Till we have a right notion of God and his attributes, it is impossible we should be able to judge of any case of religion: we may be very learned in all the doctrines and disputes of this and of past ages; and it is a learning which may well make us mad, if we have no rule to guide us through all the difficulties that surround us: but he who has fixed in his mind a just notion of God and of his attributes, will find his way to peace, be the darkness about him ever so thick. It is a great misfortune to a man to know much of religion, and little of God: such a man's religion must either be his plague or his contempt; it must appear to him either ridiculous or terrible: and let him take it which way he will, he will find a terror in it at last. It is in vain therefore to seek for satisfaction till we know God, till we can say to our hearts, 'We know in whom we have trusted.' This will make our religion become an holy and reverential fear, unmixed with terror and confusion; it will make our knowlege in religious matters become a wisdom unto salvation, and preserve to us that true freedom of mind to which as well the scoffers of the age as the superstitious are mere strangers.

Secondly, false notions of God, and of the honor and worship due to him, are another source of religious terror. What has been already said of the true notion of God may suffice to show how destructive all false notions of God are to the peace of mankind: and as false notions of the honor and worship due to God derive themselves from the false notions which men entertain of God himself, there is no great difference in the cases, and both are to be resolved on the same reason; this latter may indeed be illustrated by great variety of historical evidence. What was their case who sacrificed their sons and their daughters, and gave the fruit of their body

as an atonement for the sin of their soul? What was theirs, who cut themselves with knives in the honor of their God, and endeavored to move his compassion, not with the sorrow, but with the blood of their hearts? I wish all instances of this sort were confined to the heathen world, and had never corrupted the doctrines of Christ; but what must we say to the tedious and expensive pilgrimages and processions; what to the unnatural mortifications and sullen retirements from the world, practised and recommended in some parts of the Christian Church? Are not all these marks of slavish fear, and of a religion that carries terror with it? Were you to instruct an ignorant person in the nature of God, by telling him that he takes delight in seeing men punish and afflict themselves, in seeing them divest themselves of all comforts of life, and retire to a state of mournful silence and solitude; what would he think this Being was? Would he not imagine him to want benevolence and kindness towards his creatures, and that his service was a state of slavery and misery? Doubtless he would.

To this head we may refer the terrors which arise from the unwarranted expectations which men raise to themselves from religion, which seldom fail to be a plague and a torment to them at the last. One enters with warmth and zeal into the service of God, not doubting but he shall find it turn to very good account in his worldly affairs: he resolves to be very good, and expects to be very rich and prosperous. As soon as any calamity befalls him, he is surprised, confounded; all his hopes and comforts vanish; and he begins to think himself forsaken of God, and given up to destruction. Another, perhaps, fallen into distress, takes up a religious purpose to apply himself to God by prayer: if he meets not with the deliverance he expects, (and surely our petitions ought not in reason to prescribe to Providence,) he falls into the very fears before described, and thinks that God regards him not. This seems to have been the Psalmist's case; for thus he describes his own woe: 'I have cried day and night before thee.—Why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?'

Such persons as these are not apt to seek a remedy, nor yet

to admit any: they submit to sorrow and despair; and it seems to be their only comfort to refuse comfort: by this they think they make a right sacrifice to God's justice, giving up to misery the soul which he abhors. Now if true religion teaches you to expect temporal prosperity as the certain reward of serving God; if it has engaged to you, that all your prayers, without distinction, shall be answered; that every affliction, though sent perhaps for your good and your correction, shall be removed as soon as you desire it; then charge all these sufferings to the account of true religion: but if religion has taught you no such lesson, beware how you charge God foolishly, and call that unfaithfulness in him, which is in truth the folly and weakness of man.

Now as these terrors are hard to be cured, when once they have got possession of the mind, for they are obstinate against reason and advice, so there is the more reason to guard against them before they come. We ought, in all conditions of life, to limit our hopes and expectations within the bounds of probability, otherwise we expose ourselves to perpetual disappointments and vexation. The same rule is necessary to be observed in religion: we ought never to expect more from God than he has expressly promised, or than he may grant consistently with the measures by which his providence rules and governs the world: if we exceed these bounds, religion, instead of being our comfort, will soon become our torment; but we and not religion will be to blame. If we consider that this world is a state of trial, and that afflictions are trials, we can never lay it down to ourselves, that God will relieve us at our request from all afflictions; for this would be owning ourselves in a state of trial, and at the same time expecting that no trial should come near us: it is supposing that God has shown us a way to defeat the great end of his providence in sending us into this world; he sent us here to be proved, and yet we think to prevail on him not to prove us. In the great end which we ought to propose by our religion, the salvation of our souls, we can never be disappointed but through our own fault. This is our true comfort, and it is sufficient to support us under the evils of the life that now is, and to deliver us from the fears of that which is to come.

You see now, from this discourse, that religion, though it may minister occasion, is not the cause of these terrors. But you may reply, were there no sense of religion, there could be no such terrors. Very right: and it is as true, that, were there no reason, there would be no such apprehensions. Will you blame God now for making you rational creatures? If not, you must not blame him for making you capable of religion; but you must use the reason he has given you to search after and know him, and then your religion will be your comfort: then will you be able to say to yourself, and declare to others, 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.'

DISCOURSE XXVII.

PART II.

Two other kinds of religious terror, together with their causes, remain to be considered; and they are the terrors of guilt, and the terrors which owe their rise to the accidental disorders or infirmities of mind or body. To proceed then:

The terrors of guilt are those which can alone pretend to be consonant to the notions of true religion, and to derive themselves by just consequence from them. If there be any truth in religion, natural or revealed, it is most certain, 'that God will judge the world in righteousness, and render to every man according to his work: to those who do well, life and happiness; to those who obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath.' As this belief will be attended with peace and comfort of mind, where men sincerely endeavor to perfect holiness in the fear of God, so must it necessarily produce 'tribulation and anguish in every soul that doth evil.' This is so plain and evident a case, that I think no one will demand a reason why it is or must be so. The fear of damnation is, without all question, a reasonable fear; and it would be a very presumptuous as well as a fruitless attempt, to persuade a man to live

without fear, who apprehends himself to be in such a state. Weak and superstitious minds do often indeed form very wrong judgments concerning their own state and condition towards God; in which case, though the judgment itself be erroneous, yet the fear is natural, and connected to the judgment by just consequence. It is a great work of charity to assist such weak persons, and to enable them to think better of God than they do, and not worse of themselves than they deserve; and by such means to restore peace and quiet to their minds: but to endeavor to remove their fears, without correcting the false opinions from which they proceed, must be the effect of great folly or great impiety. If you imagine the case capable of comfort and consolation, the conceived opinion of having merited God's wrath not being removed, it is a sign of great weakness and ignorance in the nature both of God and man: or if you would raise a courage to encounter these fears, and inspire sinners with an hardiness against the apprehensions of futurity, you can only hope to throw them into the other extreme; for such an hardy contempt of God's judgments cannot consist with a rational sense of religion. These fears, proceeding from guilt, are both natural and rational; it is impossible therefore that either nature or reason should afford any assistance, or sufficient remedy against these terrors; unless we suppose reason and nature to be made up of contradictions. Is it a natural state of the mind to be at ease when real dangers surround us? is it rational to be unconcerned for ourselves when we are within view of endless misery? If not, he must be in a very unnatural state who can separate between his guilt and his fears.

The power of conscience is seen in all men; it is common to all countries, to all religions; to the learned and unlearned, to rich and poor: it is an essential character of a rational mind; and therefore to man, who is a rational creature, it is natural. When we offend wilfully against our sense of good and evil, conscience never fails to reproach and torment us with the apprehensions of evil and misery to befall us: and though nature has not furnished us with a distinct knowlege of the misery prepared for the wicked, yet natural conscience gives every wicked man a certain expectation of it.

These natural fears of conscience are also rational fears: there are some natural fears planted in us for wise purposes, which yet our reason will teach us in great measure to overcome. Such is the natural fear of death: all men have it; but the more we consult our reason and religion about it, the less will our fear be: they will furnish our minds with comfort against this terror, and enable us to expect it with calmness and tranquillity of mind. But the case is otherwise in the fears of guilt; the more we advise with our reason, the better ground we shall find for these fears; the more we consult the principles of religion, the more certainly we shall be persuaded that the fears of the guilty are no delusions, but real terrors. How then shall we escape these terrors, which nature, reason, and religion have bound on the guilty mind with so strong cords?

So hard is it to get rid of these terrors, that in many cases they grow up to the full stature of distraction; and are too strong for all the assistance and comfort that can be administered. When this is the case, a sinner is a woful spectacle; the grief of his soul may be read in his countenance, from which all cheerfulness is banished, and nothing to be seen but melancholy and despair. His days are without pleasure, and his nights without rest: he hates the company of his friends, and if he retires, it is to converse with the worst enemy he has, that is, with himself: his life is one scene of misery, and he lives only because he is afraid to die. The horrors of his mind no words can describe; all his thoughts work together to torment him; his imagination calls him every day to judgment, and sends him back condemned: amidst these tortures his 'strength faileth, and his life draweth nigh unto the grave,' and he dies of a guilty conscience; a distemper which no medicine can reach, no art can succor.

Now this misery being so great and unsupportable, and all men so liable to it in consequence of sin, we may well imagine that the wit and invention of mankind have been constantly at work to find a remedy for this sore disease. Natural conscience and reason make the connexion between guilt and fear; remove these, and the fears must vanish; as is evident in the case of idiots and madmen, who often do great mischief without

showing any concern or trouble for their actions. This is one of the devices which profligate sinners have found out to ease their burden: they bid defiance to conscience and reason, and set themselves resolutely to despise both God and man. Where there is great strength of body, joined with a rude and brutish courage, this method may do for a while, but time will always show the folly of it.

Others, who are not capable of such outrageous impiety, and yet can as little bear the reproaches of conscience and reason, are often tempted to give themselves up to excess of vice and intemperance; they find ease in losing their understanding, and their pains abate as they grow incapable of reflexion. How miserable are the terrors of guilt, which can make men willing to forget themselves, that they may forget their fears!

But these are very unnatural methods, and which but few, in comparison, are capable of using; and yet the case before us is a general case concerning all men, as they are sinners, and have more or less offended against the light and reason of their own minds. Let us consider then, what more general and rational methods have been approved for the cure of this evil: these are to be found in the several forms of religion, which do or have prevailed in the world; all of them pretending to reconcile sinners to God, some by one kind of expiation, some by another. It would be endless to set before you the particular methods used under the several forms of religion: it is a question of much more importance to inquire whether reason and natural religion can possibly furnish a remedy for this evil or no.

All methods applicable to this purpose may be reduced to two general heads; to external rites and ceremonies, and to internal acts of the mind.

As to external rites and ceremonies, they are to be found in great abundance: we meet with sacrifices, oblations, washings, and cleansings, in almost all parts of the world, both among Jews and Heathens. How these several rites came to be applied to the purposes of religion, is a matter not easily to be accounted for: it will be allowed, I suppose, that nothing ought to be esteemed a part of the religion of reason, for which no reason can be assigned: and yet, who can say on what

principle he proceeded, who first killed a lamb or a kid, and offered it to God as an expiation for guilt, or as a proper means of obtaining his blessing and protection? What connexion is there between the sin of a man and the sacrifice of an ox? If I deserve to be punished for iniquity, can I deserve to be pardoned for shedding the blood of some poor senseless animals? Or what is God that he should accept such gifts? what are divine justice and mercy, that they should be moved by such oblations? If these questions cannot be answered, the consequence must be, that these external performances are no part of natural religion.

The sacrifices and oblations under the law of Moses were of divine institution; and whatever virtue they had in them, they had it in consequence of the institution, and the promise annexed to it; which is a point in which mere natural religion can have no concern; and the author to the Hebrews has assured us that even these sacrifices 'did not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience.' The use he assigns to them is, that they 'sanctified to the purifying of the flesh,' that is, they gave a legal or external purity; so that he who had duly, in these methods, done away his uncleanness, or atoned for his errors, was a legal member of the external church and commonwealth of Israel. But what is this to the taking away of guilt, and to restoring us to the favor of God?

It has been pleaded in behalf of sacrifices and the like performances, that they are very expressive signs of a sinner's religion: he who brings a bullock to the altar as an offering for sin, confesses his iniquity; when he slays him, he acknowleges before God what he himself ought to suffer; and deprecates the punishment which he owns to be justly due to himself. Allow all this, and it must appear to you that these external performances are in themselves of no value, but have all their value from that true religion, and those acts of it, of which they are significative. I will not trouble you with inquiring on what motives or principles of reason natural religion dresses herself out in signs and symbols: the inquiry is not pertinent to the present purpose: for be this as it will, the value of the signs depends on the true value of the things signified, which are internal acts: and the question before us

must be determined by considering, whether the internal acts of religion, natural and proper to the state of a sinner, can expiate guilt and restore to the favor of God.

The religion of a sinner is an application for pardon; and unless it can prescribe a proper method for obtaining it, it is useless and insignificant. The two attributes of God, with which this religion is chiefly concerned, are his justice and mercy: but if we argue that infinite justice must necessarily punish all iniquity, that infinite mercy must extend to all offences, we get into a maze, in which we may wander for ever, without finding any way to get out. I will suppose therefore, (and it is the very truth,) that justice and mercy both meet in the rules of reason and equity; and that the judgments of God are righteous judgments, free from all such blemishes as human judgments are liable to from a weak inclination to mercy, or a rigorous affectation of justice.

In a point of mere natural religion, I will not expect the doctrines of revelation to be admitted as principles; I will not insist therefore that all men are sinners: and I think it will not be denied that great numbers are; so many, that natural religion can be of little use, if it has no remedy for this case.

Now all that natural religion has to offer to God in behalf of a sinner, is the sorrow of his heart for what is past, and the purpose of his mind to offend no more.

Let us consider this case: sorrow for sin, in such as apprehend they shall certainly and miserably suffer for it, is a very natural passion; but there is no virtue in it: it is not so much as the effect of choice; for a man must necessarily grieve, when he is sure he has made himself miserable. It never was made part of a virtuous man's character, that he lived in fear of the gallows or the whipping-post; and did you know any good man possessed with such fears, instead of commending his temper, you must needs laugh at his folly. This observation must cut off all that repentance which arises merely from apprehensions of evil; and much I fear that it will, in great measure, disable natural religion from finding a remedy against guilt. The generality of mankind are far from being philosophers, or able to look back on their iniquities with so much calmness and judgment as are necessary to create a just abhor-

rence of vice, and to produce a real change in the affections of the heart, and restore the pure love of God and of virtue, where vice and lust had been long predominant. Let us allow to such a change as this all that can be asked in its behalf: what then? Will you conclude that the world has no reason to look beyond natural religion for a remedy against sin? Will you call that a proper religion for the world, which is fitted only to the purposes of perhaps twenty in a country, and perhaps not to half the number? God has dealt with mankind in such methods as are suited to that degree of reason which he has generally bestowed, and to which men generally may arrive, under the cares and burdens and necessary employments of life: and there is nothing more absurd than to think all men capable of such reasonings as some few of distinguished abilities have arrived at: especially in the case of religion, which is and ought to be every man's concern, to suppose that the speculations of a few contemplative men can be reduced to common use and practice, is downright enthusiasm. All wise governors have fortified their laws with penalties, intending that the fear of punishment should keep the subject from offending; but without ever imagining themselves obliged to spare all such as should discover a fear of the punishment, after they had incurred it by disobedience. Now our reason being the common rule by which we judge of the actions of all reasonable beings, and by which we ought to regulate our own; how come we to judge it reasonable for God to do that which, in parallel circumstances, we never think reasonable to do ourselves? It may be said that we are not capable of judging in this case, and distinguishing between the mere fear of punishment, and the rational sorrow for having offended; but God can distinguish, and therefore there is ground to suppose him to act otherwise than reason in our circumstances can oblige us to act. Admit this difference, and it follows that all who are willing to reform merely through the fears and terrors of guilt are without remedy: which shows that the far greater number of sinners are in a helpless state under natural religion.

But let us see what the condition is of one seriously convinced of the iniquity of sin, and purposing to forsake it. The case supposes him to have sinned so as to deserve punishment

by all the rules of reason and equity: the question is, whether a sincere alteration of mind can give him security of a pardon. I suppose it agreed by all who admit a future judgment, that misery and happiness are set before us on some terms: I suppose likewise, that it will be deemed reasonable for God to act on such terms as reason itself, the interpreter of God's will in this case, proposes to us. Consider now: we come into this world reasonable creatures, enabled to distinguish between good and evil; we find ourselves accountable for our behavior to God, our Maker and our Judge: from these principles the consequence is certain, that obedience to the moral law is the condition of salvation: but how will you come to the consequence so much wanted, that whoever lives in disobedience shall be saved, if ever he grows sensible of the folly and iniquity of so doing? Is this condition implied in any law in the universe? Would it be a fit condition for God to propose to men at their first setting out in a state of nature? No, you will say, it would enervate the force of all his laws. How comes it then to be absolutely fit for God to do that, which it is absolutely unfit he should ever promise or profess? But we depend, you will say, on the equity and goodness of God. You do well: but where do you learn this equity? How do you find it to be equitable that men should live by one rule, and be judged by another? No man will affirm that reason teaches us to think God and his law satisfied by sinning, and then repenting: we are not to conduct our lives by this rule, why then must we needs be judged by this rule? especially since it is a confessed maxim, that the rule of life and the rule of judgment ought to be the same. It may perhaps be thought that the goodness of God considered, and the weakness and frailty of man, and his inability to pay a punctual obedience in all things to the law of reason, it is a reasonable construction on the law of nature to expect pardon for our failings and omissions, and that the very terms of our obedience carry this equitable construction with them. This to me seems the most material thing to be said on the subject, and I readily allow it: but the most that can be made of it is, that we shall be intitled to equitable allowances in the course of an imperfect obedience: but it does not come up to the case of such, who under all these allowances fall

from their obedience, and forfeit the favor of God. But these are the persons for whom we seek relief.

On the whole, it does not appear that natural religion has any certain cure for the terrors of guilt; because the title by obedience being forfeited, there are no certain principles of reason from which we can conclude how far, and to what instances, the mercy of God will extend; because we can have no assurance of ourselves, that our sorrow is such, and our resolutions of amendment such, as may deserve mercy; and, lastly, because this whole matter, whatever there be in it, is founded on reasons and speculations too exact and too refined to be of common use to mankind. And this last reason alone will, I think, sufficiently justify the wisdom and goodness of God in proposing to the world a safe and general method for the salvation of sinners: for what if you have penetration enough to see a way for sinners to escape under natural religion; must your great parts be a measure for God's dealing with all the world? Shall thousands and thousands live and die without comfort, because they cannot reason as you do? This consideration should make those who have the highest opinion of themselves, and therefore of natural religion, adore the goodness of God, in condescending to the infirmities of men, and showing them the way to mercy, which they were unable to find out. This he has done by the revelation of the gospel of Christ Jesus, which is the sinner's great charter of pardon, a certain remedy against all the fears and terrors of guilt.

Here then is a safe retreat for the guilty conscience; here God appears, and gives his own unalterable word for your security: the Son of God is your Mediator and High Priest, to offer up and sanctify the sorrows of a broken heart; and to bring down spiritual strength, joy, and comfort to the penitent, and to perfect the work begun in you by his grace and assistance. Let no man therefore sink under the terrors of guilt, but let him approach the throne of grace; but if in no confidence of himself, yet in full confidence in the promises made through Christ, by whom and through whom every sinner who returns to God shall be saved.

After so much done for the security of sinners on God's part, and such great consolations provided against the terrors of guilt,

it is much to be lamented there should be any still incapable of comfort: yet such there are, of whom I proposed to speak in the last place, whose religious fears arise from accidental disorders of mind or body. This case is not subject to reason, and therefore much cannot be said on it. Whatever the union of soul and body is, so united they are, that the disorders of one often derive themselves to the other. A melancholy mind will waste the strength, and bring paleness and leanness on the body: disorders in the body do often affect the mind; a stroke of the palsy will rob a man of the use of his understanding, and leave him disabled in mind as well as body. For this reason it is that I ascribe some religious fears to the disorders of the body, though they properly belong to the mind. We call only great disorders in the mind madness; but all disorders, as far as they extend, are of the same kind: the melancholy man, who thinks himself in a state of damnation, without any reason, or power to reason on his case, is as certainly in this point a madman, as the poor wretch whose disorder has taken another turn, and makes him believe himself to be a king or an emperor. There are many instances of this kind abroad in the world: the unhappy sufferers, were they capable of receiving the advice, should be directed to seek their cure from physicians rather than divines. Were I to give you instances in what manner these religious fears work, what unreasonable suspicions and jealousies they create, how full they oftentimes are of absurdity and manifest contradiction, it would evidently appear to you, that they are truly distempers either in the mind or body; but this would be but melancholy entertainment, and of no great use. Such persons as these are not chargeable with seeking false comfort for themselves; for it is part of their distemper to refuse all comfort. The true comfort we have for them they are unable to receive, that they are not capable of judging of themselves, and that he, to whom judgment belongeth, will deal with them not according to their imaginations, but according to the rules of his own goodness and righteousness.

These terrors cannot be imputed as a blemish to religion; not by him at least, who acknowleges the providence of God, and whose principle of religion is reason: for all madness is de-

structive of reason, as much as these terrors are of religion: they are both destructive: they are evils to which we must submit: and if we cannot account for the reason of them, it becomes us to be dumb, and not open our mouths in his presence, 'whose ways are past finding out.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXVIII.

PSALM XIX.—VERSE 14.

THIS text chosen for the purpose of laying open the scheme of thought running through the whole psalm, which contains one of the completest and most useful forms of devotion to be found in this part of Scripture. When a king stands before the altar, we are led to expect a royal sacrifice, and songs of praise conceived in no common strain: but here the crown and sceptre are laid by, the royal dignity is forgotten, and the Psalmist's whole mind is employed in contemplating the mighty things of Providence, displayed in the works of nature and of grace.

The piety of this Psalm is so natural and yet so exalted, so plain and so pathetic, that it is hardly possible to read it, without feeling something of the spirit in which it was indited: *The heavens declare the glory of God,* says the pious king, *and the firmament showeth his handy work,* &c. He begins with the works of creation, to magnify the power and wisdom of the Creator: this topic enlarged on. From the mighty scene of nature the Psalmist turns to consider the still greater works of grace. The rational world, as in itself the noblest, so has it obtained the more peculiar care of Providence in preserving and adorning it: this topic enlarged on. The holy Psalmist next sings the triumphs of grace, and the mercy of God in the restoration of mankind: *the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple,* &c.

Is it possible, while we praise God for all his mercies, to

forget how undeserved they are? Can we help reflecting, that although God has thus secured us with a law that is perfect, with commandments that are pure, with judgments that are true and righteous, yet still our own folly or wickedness is perpetually betraying us into error, or driving us into sins. The Psalmist saw the justness of this reflexion; and while his heart glowed with a sense of God's mercies, he turned short on himself with this complaint, *Who can understand his errors?*

This is followed by a fervent prayer to God for pardon and protection: from the prospect of God's power and goodness, and our own weakness and misery, the soul easily melts into sorrow and devotion, lamenting what it feels, and imploring what it wants from the hand which alone is able to save. *O cleanse thou me,* says the royal penitent, *from my secret faults:* secret he calls his faults, not to extenuate them, but with respect to their number; so often had he offended, that his memory was too frail to keep an exact register of his errors: this sense well expressed in our old translation.

But though our sins are very numerous, yet some are distinguished by uncommon guilt, and will ever be present to our minds when we approach the throne of grace for pardon: these we should particularly lament; against these we should particularly pray; and in this strain the Psalmist continues his devotion: *keep thy servant also from presumptuous sins,* &c. Having thus extolled his Maker for his power and mercy, and humbled himself on account of his own iniquities, he closes the scene in the language of the text.

The scheme of thought which runs through this excellent composition, sets in a fine light the beauty of praise and prayer, when duly performed, and accompanied with proper affections of the heart. A scene of misery, drawn by the poet's or the painter's skill, has force to move our pity and compassion; much less can we stand by unconcerned, when we behold the misery of a soul afflicted for sin, hear the ardent prayers poured

forth to God for pardon and mercy, or see the tears which flow from the pangs of a wounded spirit; for this case, this condition, is our own; and those tears and cries for mercy should be ours also.

There is the same reason for our being affected with the praises of God, and joining to give glory to his name, when we read the songs of thanksgiving recorded in Scripture; for his mercies are equally dispensed; and when we share the blessings, how can we refuse to bear our part in offering up the incense of praise? This Psalm, how nobly is it penned! yet there is not one act of providence mentioned, of which *we* do not as largely reap the benefit, and for which we are not as much in duty bound to be thankful, as David himself. Nay, the advantage is on our side: the heavens indeed, and all the works of creation, have remained the same since David's time; but the Sun of Righteousness himself has risen in our firmament. And can we be silent, who enjoy the fulness of God's mercies, whilst the holy Psalmist speaks with such rapture and pleasure of his laws and judgment: *more desirable,* they were to him, *than the finest gold; sweeter than honey,* &c.; and yet he lived under the Mosaic law, a yoke hard to be borne. Had he known the gospel, and tasted the righteousness of this new law, what strains of holy eloquence would have flowed: this point enlarged on. As our theme has been thus exalted, so should our praises be likewise; so should the affections of our souls be raised. Our praises are at best a poor tribute for what we have received; and they have their imperfections even when best performed: and this reflexion seems to have led the Psalmist to the words which close his excellent composition: *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.* If these words are considered with a retrospect on what went before, the meaning of them must be what has been suggested: he had been praising God for all

his goodness; had been fervently imploring his protection from the allurements of sin: but what were his prayers and praises in the sight of the Almighty? what valuable sacrifice could dust and ashes offer up? Struck with this just sense of humility, he stirs not from the place or subject of his devotion, before he has begged pardon for the imperfection of his sacrifice, and implored God's acceptance of the poor tribute he was able to pay him. An example worthy of our imitation! and which yet we are hardly worthy enough to imitate: for if we consider our coldness in prayers and praise, our inattention, and the obtrusion of worldly thoughts in our worship of God, we must needs think it the highest presumption to desire his acceptance of such a tribute. This was not the Psalmist's case: and if even his devotion required an excuse to appear before the presence of God, what must become of ours?

But, secondly, the text is capable of a more enlarged sense: the Psalmist had begged mercy for his secret faults; had implored God's aid to preserve him from presumptuous sin: and if the thought be continued to the words of the text, in them he beseeches God to take under his direction likewise the words of his mouth, and the thoughts of his heart, that he might continue blameless in thought, and word, and deed. This sense expresses the greatest regard to virtue and innocence, and a full dependence on God's grace and protection. He knew that the Almighty not only saw his open acts, but spied out all his secret thoughts: he knew that it was in vain to wash his hands in innocency, unless he also purged his heart from evil desires: to God therefore he applied to guard the passage of his heart, and the door of his lips, that nothing unclean might enter into one, or proceed out of the other: this topic enlarged on to the end.

DISCOURSE XXVIII.

PSALM XIX.—VERSE 14.

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

I HAVE made choice of these words, with which the holy Psalmist shuts up this nineteenth Psalm, intending to open to you the scheme of thought which runs through the whole. It contains one of the completest forms of devotion, and of the most general use, of those recorded in his writings. When his thoughts turn on his own circumstances, which were in all respects great and uncommon, and such as the generality of men can never experience, it is no wonder to find his prayers and his songs of praises conceived in no common strain. When a king stands before the altar, we may well expect a royal sacrifice; such an one as is not expected from a private hand, nor fit to be offered by it. But here, in the Psalm before you, the crown and the sceptre are laid by, his own dignity is forgotten, and his whole mind employed in contemplating the mighty things of Providence, displayed in the works of nature and of grace. Exalted thoughts of God do naturally produce the lowest, which are always the justest, of ourselves. Thus the royal Psalmist, having warmed his heart with the glory of the Almighty, as if he were now in the posture in which all kings must one day appear before their Maker, confesses his own weakness, and flies to mercy and grace for protection: 'Who can understand his errors?' says he, 'cleanse thou me from my secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.'

The piety of this Psalm is so natural, and yet so exalted;

so easy to be understood, so adapted to move the affections, that it is hardly possible to read it with any attention, without feeling something of the same spirit by which it was indited: 'The heavens,' says the holy king, 'declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowlege. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.' He begins with the works of the creation, to magnify the power and wisdom of the Creator; they are a perpetual instruction to mankind; every day and every night speak his goodness, and by their regular and constant vicissitude, set forth the excellency of wisdom by which they are ordered. This book of nature is written in every language, and lies open to all the world: the works of the creation speak in the common voice of reason, and want no interpreter to explain their meaning; but are to be understood by people of all languages on the face of the earth: 'There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.' From these works in general he singles out one, to stand as a testimony of the power of his Maker: the sun is the great spirit of the world, the life that animates these lower parts: how constant and unwearied is his course! how large his circuit, to impart light and genial heat to every dark corner of the earth! 'He is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.'

From this mighty scene and prospect of nature the Psalmist turns his thoughts to the consideration of the still greater works of grace: the rational world, as in itself the noblest, so has it been the more peculiar care of Providence to preserve and adorn it. The sun knows its course, and has always trod the path marked out by the Creator: the sea keeps its old channel, and in its utmost fury remembers the first law of its Maker, 'Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther:' but freedom and reason, subject to no such restraint, have produced infinite variety in the rational world: of all the creatures man only could forget his Maker and himself, and prostitute the honor of both by robbing God of the obedience due to him,

and by submitting himself a slave to the elements of the world. When he looked up to the heavens and saw the glory of the sun and stars, instead of praising the Lord of all, he foolishly said, these are thy gods, O man! When man was thus lost in ignorance and superstition, God manifested himself again, gave him a law to direct his will and inform his reason, and to teach him in all things how to pursue his own happiness. This was a kind of second creation, a work that calls as much both for our wonder and our praise as any or all the works of nature. And thus the holy Psalmist sings the triumphs of grace, and extols the mercy and power of God in the restoring mankind from the bondage of ignorance and idolatry: 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes: the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned; and in keeping them there is great reward.' To these divine oracles the sinner owes the conversion of his soul: to the light of God's word the simple owes his wisdom; nay, even the pleasures of life, and all the solid comforts we enjoy, flow from the same living spring: the statutes of the Lord do rejoice the heart as well as enlighten the eyes; and not only show us the danger and miseries of iniquity, and by showing teach us to avoid them, but do lead us likewise to certain happiness and joy for evermore: 'for in keeping them there is great reward.'

But is it possible, whilst thus we praise and adore God for all his mercies, to forget one great circumstance which affects both them and ourselves? I mean, how undeserved they are! It is a reflexion, which, like the pillar of the cloud that waited on the Israelites, casts light and beauty on the mercies of God, darkness and confusion of face on ourselves. Can we help thinking, that, notwithstanding God has thus secured and hedged us about with a law that is perfect, with commandments that are pure, with judgments that are true and righteous

altogether; yet still our own weakness is perpetually betraying us into error, our folly or our wickedness driving us into sins more in number than either we can or care to remember? The royal Psalmist saw the justness of this reflexion, and whilst his heart glowed with the sense of God's unbounded mercies, he turned short on himself with this complaint, 'Who can understand his errors?'

This complaint is followed by a fervent prayer to God for pardon and protection: from the prospect of the power and goodness of God and our own weakness and misery, the soul easily melts into sorrow and devotion, lamenting what it feels, and imploring what it wants from the hand which only is able to save and to redeem: 'O cleanse thou me,' says the royal penitent, 'from secret faults.' This petition flowed from an heart intimately touched with the sense of its own unworthiness: secret he calls his faults, not with a design to extenuate his crimes, or as if he thought the actions he had now in his view of so doubtful a nature, that it was not easily to be judged whether they should be placed among the sinful or the indifferent circumstances of his life; and therefore, if they were faults, they were secret ones, such as stole from him without the consent or approbation of his mind: but secret he calls them with respect to their number; so often he had offended, that his memory was too frail to keep an exact register of all his errors; but though they were secret to him, yet well he knew that God had placed them in the light of his countenance; and therefore, though he could neither number nor confess them, he begs that they might not be imputed, or rise up in judgment against his soul. This sense is well expressed in our old translation, 'Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults!'

But though our sins are more in number than the hairs of our head, yet some there are that stand distinguished by an uncommon guilt, and will always be present to our minds, whenever we approach the throne of grace for pardon. These we should particularly lament, against these we should particularly pray, when we seek to God for strength and assistance. In this strain the holy Psalmist continues his devotion, 'Keep

back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.'

Having thus extolled his Maker for the greatness of his power and mercy, and humbled himself for the number and the heinousness of his iniquities, he closes this scene of praise and of devotion in the language of the text, 'Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.'

I have endeavored to open to you the scheme of thought which runs through this excellent pattern of prayer and meditation; hoping by this more effectually to warm your minds into a sense of this duty, and to set before you in a better light the beauty both of praise and prayer, when duly performed, and accompanied with proper affections of the heart, than by any thing I could say to you on the subject. It is a subject indeed that speaks for itself; and a prayer, or a song of praise, composed in the true spirit of piety and devotion, is the greatest incitement, as well as the best direction, for the performance of the respective duties. A man's heart must be as cold as marble, who can read or hear the songs of holy joy and rapture, with which the saints of old gave praise to their Maker, and not feel some resentments of the same spirit of joy and gratitude in his breast; or who can go over a prayer which expresses the guilt of sin, and confesses the weakness of nature, and pours forth the cries of an afflicted soul for mercy and pardon, and not be touched with the description of circumstances which are so much his own; or not send forth the wishes of his own heart to attend the cries for mercy and pardon, which he so certainly stands in need of obtaining. A scene of misery, drawn either by the poet's or the painter's skill, has force enough to move the pity of a compassionate heart; for we are so near allied to the sufferings of our fellow-creatures, by sharing in the same nature, which as it subjected them, so it exposes us to the miseries we behold, that we cannot resist the impressions of sorrow arising from circumstances which may any day happen to be our own; much less can we stand by, as unconcerned lookers on, when we behold the misery of a soul afflicted for sin, or when we hear the ardent

prayers which are poured forth in the presence of God for pardon and mercy, or see the tears which flow from the pangs of a wounded spirit; for this case, this miserable condition, not only may be, but most certainly is our own: these tears, these cries for mercy, should be ours, since the cause is ours from whence they proceed; nor can we well help partaking in them, nor be altogether insensible of the grief of our fellow-sufferers.

There is the same reason for our being affected with the praises of God, and joining to give glory to his name, whenever we read the songs of thanksgiving recorded in Scripture, as instances of the tribute which God expects, and which the saints are used to pay; for his mercies are dispensed with an equal hand, he maketh the sun to rise on the just and the unjust; and when we share the blessings, and partake in the same mercies, how can we refuse to bear our part in offering up the incense of praise; or how resist the motions of gratitude, which arise from the sense of those enjoyments which are the gift of heaven? This Psalm of David, in how exalted a strain is it penned! how nobly is the song raised from circumstances which at once set forth in equal beauty the majesty and the mercy of the Almighty! and yet there is not one act of providence mentioned, one instance of grace recorded, that you do not as largely reap the benefit of, and are as much in duty and gratitude bound to be thankful for, as even David himself. Nay, the advantage is certainly on your side in this respect: the heavens indeed are the same they were in David's time; and the day and night, constant to their Maker's law, have walked the same unwearied round: the sun shines out with the same beauty and light to animate and refresh the world: the material sun I mean; for since David's time the Sun of righteousness himself has arose in our firmament, and shed forth the choicest blessings of heaven on the inhabitants of the earth: the glories of the Messiah's reign, and the happiness of his days, were prospects, which at a distance, and but darkly seen, could fill the mouths of the saints and prophets with the praises of the Lord! And can we be silent, who enjoy the fulness of those mercies, to whom the Saviour of the world has opened the richest treasures of God's bounty and goodness? Look back

and see with what pleasure and rapture the holy Psalmist speaks of the laws and judgments of God; 'more desirable,' they were to him, 'than the finest gold; sweeter than honey and the honey-comb;' and yet he lived under the Mosaic law, a yoke hard to be borne. Had he seen the days of the gospel, and tasted the righteousness of this new law, I am at a loss even to imagine in what strains of holy eloquence his joy would have flowed. When he applies to God for pardon and forgiveness for past offences, for strength and assistance to preserve him for the future, with what a noble resignation of soul, and sure trust in God, does he discharge this part of his devotion! And yet he had not all the encouragements for this duty which we enjoy: he had never heard the melody of that heavenly voice which daily calls us to repentance, 'Come unto me all ye that travel and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you:' nor had he received those express promises of grace and spiritual assistance, which have since been confirmed to us by the blood of the new covenant. To return therefore to the thought which made way for these reflexions: we have all imaginable reason to join with all our hearts, and all our minds, in these exalted forms of prayer and praise: we on whom the blessings of heaven have been doubled, who have been made the children of God by the Spirit of adoption, who have had the charter of God's pardon granted to us by his blessed Son, and have received the promises of a kingdom, which shall remain as long as time endureth. As our theme has been thus exalted, so should our praises be likewise; so should the affections of our souls be raised to acknowlege and adore the giver of these good and perfect gifts. We need not fear being too lavish on this occasion; let the tide of joy run ever so high, it cannot swell beyond the dignity of the subject: our praises are but a poor tribute for what we have received; our prayers a price of no value for what we ask: and even those too have their imperfections, when performed in the best manner; that were we not in the hands of a merciful God, who is not extreme to mark what is done amiss, we should not dare to open our mouths before him, either in prayer or in praise. And this reflexion seems to have led the holy Psalmist to that petition which is contained in the words read to you for the text, and with

which this excellent composure is closed up, 'Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.'

If we consider these words with a retrospect on what went before, and suppose the holy Psalmist here to reflect on what he had been doing, the meaning of them then must be that which I have suggested: he had been praising God for all his goodness to the children of men; had been by fervent prayer imploring his protection against the snares and allurements of sin: but what were his prayers or his praises to God? or what valuable sacrifice could dust and ashes offer up to the Almighty? Struck with this just sense of humility, he stirs not from the place or subject of his devotion, till he had first begged pardon for the lameness of his sacrifice, for the imperfections even of his prayers and praises, and implored God's acceptance of the poor tribute he was able to pay him. He knew how imperfect the best of his actions were; how unworthy his praises were of God; and how dangerous a subject prayer is, 'since we know not what we should pray for as we ought.' Prayer, if not directed by the Spirit, will be influenced by the passions, and taught the unworthy language of self-love: far therefore from being exalted with his performance, the saint retires excusing his devotion, and begging one farther mercy of God, that he would accept the service he was able to offer. An example worthy of our imitation! and which yet we are hardly worthy enough to imitate: for if we consider with what coldness we pass through our prayers and praises, with what inattention we are present at the service of God, how our thoughts wander, and our hearts are surprised into the pursuit of vain and idle conceits, or are possessed with worldly thoughts and care, we must needs think it an act of the highest presumption to desire God to receive such devotion, or to accept the meditation of such idle roving hearts. This was not the Psalmist's case: when he began the praises of God, he launched out into his course with the life and vigor of the sun, which he describes, 'like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run his race:' when his subject naturally changed on his hand, and prayer took place of praise, his mind followed his subject, and the

petitions themselves show with what zeal and fervor of spirit they were offered up. And if such devotion as this was to beg admittance to the presence of God, and not to appear without an excuse, what must become of ours? since, without injuring our own merit, many of us have reason to say, when we leave the Church, Lord, lay not this sin to our charge! For surely to approach the throne of God with indevotion, with hearts not disposed to seriousness, to sit out the prayers of the Church as if something were doing in which we have no concern, is one of those offences which are noted down in the book, and for which God will call the sons of men into judgment.

But, secondly, the words of the text are capable of a more enlarged sense: the Psalmist had begged for mercy for his secret faults; had implored the assistance of God to preserve him from presumptuous sin; and if you continue the thought to the words of the text, in them he beseeches God to take under his direction likewise the words of his mouth, and the thoughts of his heart, that he might be continued innocent and blameless in thought, word, and deed. This sense expresses the greatest regard to virtue and innocence, and the fullest dependence on the grace and protection of God: he knew that God not only saw all his actions, his open and notorious sins, but that he spied out all his ways, and knew his thoughts long before; and that it was in vain for him to wash his hands in innocence, unless he purged his heart likewise from all filthiness of spirit: to him therefore he applies, that he would guard the passage of his heart, and set a watch on the door of his lips, that nothing unclean might enter into one, or proceed out of the other. Our Lord has told us, 'That for every idle word men shall give an account in the day of judgment:' and his Apostle St. Paul has taught us, 'That there will be a day in which God will judge the secrets of all men by Christ Jesus;' which are sufficient cautions to us to be watchful over our tongues and our hearts, that they rob us not of the fruit of all our labor and hope. Unchaste thoughts and loose desires are the beginning of lewd and impure actions; and if they are generated and conceived in the heart, that fruitful womb of iniquity, they will soon be born into the world, and grow up to the full stature of sin. To secure the heart is therefore the

ground-work of virtue: it is almost the one thing necessary, since without it no other care can be effectual; it is that only which can render our praises or prayers acceptable to God, and give us courage to offer up our imperfect devotions before his throne. The best of men have their failings, and an honest Christian may be a weak one: but weak as he may be, the goodness and sincerity of his heart will entitle him to put up the petition of the text, which no hypocrite or cunning deceiver can ever make use of, 'Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXIX.

LUKE, CHAPTER XII.—VERSE 21.

THE riches of the world being often the fruits of injustice or oppression, and yet being sometimes represented in Scripture as the blessing of God on honest labor, and the reward of goodness, a great fortune being often employed for very ill purposes, and yet being applicable to the best uses in the world, the possession of riches has been either valued or despised, condemned or approved, by moralists and divines, according to the several methods by which they are obtained and employed. *The hand of the diligent,* saith Solomon, *maketh rich;* and again, *the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich; and he addeth no sorrow with it;* yet he has also said, *There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.* From this observation it may be concluded, that where riches are ill got or ill used, they are a hurt to the owner; but when honestly got and worthily enjoyed, a blessing. It is farther considered what the iniquity is which generally follows a large possession. The crimes of a rich man commonly arise from profuseness or covetousness; the first producing luxury, intemperance; the second, fraud, oppression, and uncharitableness. A rich man may be free from these vices, and still be wicked; virtue consisting not merely in the outward act, but in the principles from whence actions flow. The poor are often benefited by the scatterings of the prodigal; but is he therefore possessed of Christian charity? The parable of the rich man in Luke xxii. considered, and the true meaning of it inquired into. It is

commonly supposed, from our Lord's warning and exhortation in the 15th and 33rd verses, that covetousness was the crime of the rich man, and that the only way to be rich towards God is to sell our goods, and distribute them to the poor: but our Lord had before given a reason against covetousness: *For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth:* and the parable was added to illustrate this reason, and not to display the folly or vice of covetousness in general. The rich man is not described in the colors of a covetous man; neither can we conclude, from the circumstances of the parable, that he was void of charity. It is likewise unreasonable to limit the notion of being rich towards God, to works of charity only: all good works in proportion make us rich towards God. St. Paul speaks of the richness of good works, and St. James of the richness of faith; and in the text, to be rich to God, signifies particularly to trust in his providence, in opposition to a reliance on treasures of our own heaping up; as will be shown. The true meaning of the parable next pointed out. When our Saviour exhorted his hearers to beware of covetousness, he added, *For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth:* and this he illustrates in the parable. The aim of it then is to show that wealth is no security against the accidents and evils of life, from which nothing can protect us but the good providence of God. The rich man flowing in plenty, imagined that he had in his own hands a security against all evils; and for his presumptuous folly is reproved by God: *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?* They would fall into the power of another. *So is he,* says our Lord, *who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.* These words then are the moral of this parable: to lay up treasures for ourselves, must signify to lay up treasures for our own security; and to be rich towards God is in opposition to this, and denotes

our trust in the Almighty, and our endeavoring to procure his favor and protection; as knowing that in them only is all our hope and stability. From this we may perceive the great danger attending riches. Poverty constantly reminds us of our dependence on God; but the man who lives in the midst of plenty is too apt to forget the need which he has of God's assistance: and thus riches steal the heart from God, render it insensible to the duties of religion, and thereby destroy all virtue and holiness. It is this irreligious state of mind, and this disregard to God, which too generally attend wealth, that have made riches to be so hardly spoken of in Scripture. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus teaches us the dangerous state of great men who live without the fear of God in their hearts; and the much happier condition of the poor, who have their share of misery in this world, which often leads to glory and immortality hereafter: this is the true aim of the parable. When the rich man applies to Abraham on account of his brethren, he desires that Lazarus might go to them as a prophet, to testify the reality of a future life, lest they should come into the same sad state as himself; plainly showing that *his* condemnation was the effect of irreligion and unbelief. He also tacitly owns his and his brethren's contempt for Moses and the Prophets, in his reply to Abraham: *Nay, but if one went from the dead, they will repent.* From this it is evidently the purport of the parable not to represent the heinousness of any one particular crime for which the rich man suffered, but to show how fatally riches influence the mind to irreligion. A sense of dependence creates in the poor man a fear to offend, and a desire to please God; whilst the rich man, wanting as he thinks nothing from God, grows negligent in religion, and from thence proceeds easily to infidelity. *Love of the world* is said in Scripture to be *enmity with God;* and means not any particular vice, but that temper and disposition produced by riches, which inclines men to disobey God's commands.

Our Lord has also the same meaning, when he says, *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon*, &c.; i. e. wealth is the rival of God: for if it once gets possession of the mind, it will expel all trust in him, all regard to religion. From the above observations we may learn where a rich man ought to place his guard: he must beware of the pride of self-sufficiency, and learn to know that in riches is no security, and that he wants the protection of heaven as much as the poorest wretch in the world. A rich man who has a proper sense of this, will in consequence have the other virtues proper to his state. We may learn this submission to God from our Saviour's argument: *The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.* The utmost riches can do, is to provide food and raiment, and other such necessaries and conveniences of life: but can food ward off death, or changes of raiment stop the approaches of disease? The rich man as well as the beggar must depend on God for health and strength. Since then we must trust in God for our life and strength, had we not better still farther trust in him, and ease ourselves of unreasonable care for the things of life? To trust in God, and rely on his goodness, is to be rich towards God, and is that species which will make us happy in this life, and in that which is to come. By these means we may still enjoy our fortunes, and, as we are taught to pray, *May so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal.*

DISCOURSE XXIX.

LUKE, CHAP. XII.—VERSE 21.

So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.

THE riches of the world being often the fruits of injustice and oppression, one wealthy man's estate being raised perhaps on the ruin and poverty of hundreds, and built on the tears and cries of widows and orphans; and yet being sometimes represented in Scripture as the blessing of God on the honest labor and industry of men diligent in their calling or profession; or as the reward bestowed on a virtuous contentment and resignation of mind to the providence of the Almighty: a great fortune being often used to very ill purposes, to the increase of luxury and wantonness, to the encouragement of vice, and to the mischief of all who are the unhappy neighbors of an overgrown rich man; and yet being in itself applicable to the best uses in the world, to the promotion of virtue and holiness, to the advancement of the honor of God, and to the setting forward the common good and happiness of mankind: there being such different ways both of getting and enjoying the riches of the world, the possession of them has been either valued or despised, condemned or approved by moralists and divines, according to the view they have had of them with relation to the several methods by which they are obtained and employed. 'The hand of the diligent,' saith Solomon, 'maketh rich:' and again, 'the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it;' yet at other times he observed riches that had no blessing in them, 'there is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.'

From this observation I think all disputes about riches may be reconciled: where they are ill got, or ill used, they are an hurt to the owner; where they are honestly got, and worthily enjoyed, they are a blessing to the owner, and through his means to many others. Thus far the case is plain: but then it is a matter of farther consideration, to see what the iniquity is that generally follows a large possession. The rich man's crimes are commonly considered under the head of profuseness or covetousness: to the first are referred luxury, intemperance, and all the sins of pleasure which wealth furnishes and supports: to the second head are reduced fraud, oppression, want of kindness and charity, and all the iniquity that attends the unreasonable desire of getting or preserving an estate. All these indeed are very great and too common faults among rich men: but there is still a more secret iniquity that sticks close to great possessions, and which does not always discover itself in the ill effects before-mentioned: a man may have an estate honestly gotten, and in the eye of the world he may use it in all respects as he ought, and yet still be a very wicked rich man. What, you will say, although he be free from covetousness, given to hospitality, and liberal to the poor? if these things will not preserve riches from the contagion of guilt, what will? But before you judge too hastily in this cause, you must consider that virtue does not consist merely in the outward act; it is not the material action that denominates a man good or bad, but the judgment in this case must regard the principle from whence the actions flow. A prodigal man squanders his money without regard or distinction of persons or occasions: where tenderness and good-nature attend on this vice, the poor and miserable often gather largely of the prodigal man's scatterings: but will you call this Christian charity, where perhaps the duty owing to God was never once thought on, and of all that was given, not one farthing offered as tribute to the great Giver of every good gift; but the fountain-head was corrupt, though the stream indeed flowed in no ill channel?

If we consider the parable of the rich man, of which the words of the text are the moral or application, we shall discover what particular evil in riches our Saviour pointed at, and designed to correct by the instruction of this parable. The

story is this: 'The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?' After which follow the words of the text, 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.'

The first thing to be inquired into is the true drift and meaning of this parable. In the fifteenth verse of this chapter our Lord warns his hearers 'to beware of covetousness:' in this parable he represents the foolish rich man enlarging his barns, that he might heap up his goods in store: in the text he warns us of the danger of laying up treasures for ourselves, whilst we neglect being rich towards God: and in the thirty-third verse he exhorts us 'to sell that we have, and give alms; to provide for ourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.' From these circumstances it is commonly understood that covetousness was the rich man's crime; that enlarging his barns to receive his plentiful crop was the instance and proof of it; and that the only way to be rich towards God is to sell our goods, and to distribute them in works of charity and mercy. Thus this parable is commonly understood, but I think not rightly. Our Saviour, it is true, introduces this parable in consequence of the caution he had given against covetousness: but he had before given a reason against covetousness, 'For a man's life,' says he, 'consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth:' and the parable was added to illustrate this reason given against covetousness, and not to display the folly or vice of covetousness in general. The rich man is not described in the colors of a covetous man: his wealth arose from no oppression or usury; it was the product of his own land, which has always been esteemed as honest a way of being rich, and to proceed as much from the immediate blessing of God

as any whatever : the ground was his own ; he is not said to withhold from the rightful possessor by violence or by fraud. Thus far then there is no mark of covetousness, or of any other fault. But when he found his crop to be great, he enlarged his barns ; and this perhaps was his crime. But where was the iniquity of this ? Does not every man endeavor that his barns should be in proportion to the product of his land ? May not the most charitable man in the world have a barn, or build a barn, large enough to receive his crop, and yet be guiltless ? Nay, it is evident from hence, that covetousness, properly so called, was not his fault ; for he built his barn to lay up stores for many years, proposing rest and satisfaction in the goods already gotten, and intending to trouble himself no farther about wealth ; he had enough. A covetous man would rather have turned his goods into money, and put it to usury, and slaved on still for more. Besides, in the twentieth verse, where God is brought in reproving the rich man for his folly, there is not one word said of his building large barns to receive his fruits : ' Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.' But if the large barn had been the crime, the consistency of the parable requires that the reproof should have pointed to the crime, and it should have been said, Thou fool, this night shall the lightning from heaven consume thy large barns, or something to this purpose. Farther : neither on this is it rightly concluded from the circumstances of the parable, that this rich man was void of charity to the poor : he is represented as fully satisfied in his abundance : there had been much more reason to have thought him uncharitable, had he been represented as not contented with his abundance, but still fearful of poverty and want ; which is often the case, and the pretence of the rich uncharitable man. Nor, lastly, is it reasonable to limit and confine the notion of being rich towards God to works of charity only ; all good works in proportion make us rich towards God. St. Paul speaks in general of the richness of good works, and St. James of the richness of faith : and in the text, to be rich to God does particularly signify, to trust and rely on his providence for our life and support, in opposition to relying on treasures of our own heaping up, or large barns of our own building and filling ; as I shall show presently.

Having thus far examined the common interpretation of the parable, and shown how much short it falls of our Saviour's true aim and intent, I shall now endeavor to point out the true meaning of it, which will lead us into the right sense and understanding of the text.

When our Saviour exhorted his hearers to beware of covetousness, he supported his advice with this reason, 'For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth:' this reason he illustrates and confirms in the following parable. The aim then of the parable is to show that wealth is no security, that it is folly to pretend to arm ourselves against the accidents or casualties of life by heaping up treasures, which nothing can protect us against but the good providence and care of our heavenly Father. In this point all the circumstances of the parable meet: the rich man is represented as flowing in plenty, so that he was necessitated to pull down his barns and storehouses in order to enlarge them: this plenty made him forget God, and vainly imagine that he had a security in his own hands against all the calamities of life: his riches made him promise himself many happy days and years: in which confidence he thus expresses himself, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' This folly God reproves him for, and checks him in his presumptuous security, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?' Thou shalt die, and what then must become of those mighty pledges of thy security? So little will they avail thee, that they themselves will fall under the power of another, never to return to thee again. 'So is he,' says our Lord, 'who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.' These words, being the moral of this parable, must be expounded so as to answer the design of the parable; and therefore to lay up treasures for ourselves, must signify to lay up treasures for our own security, as if we meant to become thereby the carvers of our own fortune; consequently, to be rich towards God, being placed in opposition to laying up treasures for ourselves, must denote our placing our confidence and trust in him, our endeavoring to procure his favor and

protection, as knowing that in them only is all our hope and stability.

From this representation it is easily collected what is the dangerous circumstance attending riches, which makes them often prove so fatal to their owners; namely, that they beget an irreligious confidence and presumption in the heart of man, inclining him to forget God who formed him. A sense and feeling of want is a constant remembrance of our dependence, and is ever calling on us to look up to him, on whose mercy and goodness we exist. A life spent in these difficulties, and supported beyond all the reasonable hopes of narrow circumstances, suggests to us every moment how wonderfully God has brought us on our way, when we had neither staff nor shoes nor money in our scrip: these are the natural thoughts and suggestions of poverty. But a man who lives in the midst of plenty, and fears no want, is not apt to think of the need he has to be assisted: he that remembers nothing, but that his large estate has ever supplied both his necessities and superfluities, will hardly reflect farther, so as to come to an acknowlegement that God has been his stay ever since he fell from his mother's womb. This is the common case of riches; they steal the heart from God, and render it insensible to the duties of religion, by taking away the foundation of all religion, the sense of our dependence on the providence and care of heaven. This made our Lord cry out, 'How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven!' This insolence, this pride of mind, which is the proper growth of the rich man's soil, chokes all the seeds of virtue and holiness, and leaves no room for the plants planted by our heavenly Father to thrive and prosper: even charity itself, the choicest flower of a rich garden, flies the neighborhood of this poisonous weed, and will not take root by it.

It is this irreligiousness of mind, this disregard to God and every thing that is good, which are the too common companions of a plentiful fortune, that have made riches to be so hardly spoken of in Scripture. If you examine particular places, you will find regard is still had to this corruption of mind. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus it is not

easy to find on what account the rich man was condemned, as the case is generally supposed to be stated: the rich man is said to be 'clothed in purple and fine linen, and to fare sumptuously every day:' he was not covetous, it seems; he lived answerably to his fortune; his life is represented as a scene of ease and pleasure, but is not taxed with any notable vice or enormity: he is said to fare sumptuously, which I take to be a description of his state and grandeur, rather than an imputation of any vice; for he is not accused either of gluttony or drunkenness. But was he not, you will say, uncharitable? for poor Lazarus lay at his door, 'desiring the crumbs that fell from his table.' This circumstance rather shows that the poor used to be fed at his door. Had the intent of the parable been to have represented this rich man as hard to the poor, it would have been said that his servant drove away the poor from the door; or at least, when the poor came, that they were sent empty away: neither of which is said; but Lazarus is represented as feeding on the crumbs of the rich man's table. And this is the image given us of their different conditions in this world: the rich man sat down to a sumptuous table; the poor man was glad to feed on the crumbs and scraps that fell from it. The end of these men is well known: Lazarus was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man was tormented in hell-flames. What then does the parable teach us? Why it represents to us the dangerous state of great men, who live without the fear or love of God in their hearts; and the much happier condition of the poor, who have their share of misery in this world, which often leads to glory and immortality hereafter. If you look forward, you will see this is the true aim of the parable: when the rich man applies to Abraham for relief, and finds none, he then petitions for his brethren, that they might be warned against the danger that hung over their heads, against coming into the same sad state with himself. Here you may well imagine that he would desire they should be particularly warned against those crimes which had proved his ruin. Had he burnt in the flames for intemperance or uncharitableness, he would have begged that his brethren might have been exhorted to fly the sins that were his tormentors. But of this nothing is said: he only desires that Lazarus might go in quality of a prophet to testify

the truth and reality of a future state: which plainly shows that his condemnation was the effect of irreligion and unbelief: he lived at ease, and God was not in all his thoughts. To his request Abraham replies, 'They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them:' showing us again that the fault of these rich men was contempt of the prophets and irreligion. The rich man tacitly owns this contempt, both for himself and his brethren, by saying, 'Nay, but if one went from the dead, they will repent:' which was confessing that they had not reverence enough for Moses and the prophets, to repent on their authority and admonition, but wanted some greater motive, which he thought might be found in the appearance of one coming from the grave. From these circumstances, it is evident that the purport of the parable is not to represent to us the heinousness of any one particular crime for which the rich man suffered; but to show how fatally riches influence the mind to irreligion, and make men forget God; whilst the poor, living in continual want, have a perpetual sense of their dependence, and do in all their distress look up to Him of whom cometh their salvation. This sense of dependence creates in the poor man a fear to offend, a desire to please; whilst the rich man, wanting, as he thinks, nothing from God, has no desire to court his favor; but grows negligent and remiss in all the parts of religion, from which it is a very easy step to infidelity.

It is from these considerations that the 'love of the world' is said in Scripture to be 'enmity with God.' All vices are not attended with hatred and contempt of God; not all the vices that are commonly ascribed to riches: and therefore the love of the world, that is enmity with God, is not to be expounded by covetousness or uncharitableness, or any other particular vice; but denotes the rich man's temper and disposition, the habit of mind that grows out of a plentiful estate: and this indeed is very commonly enmity with God, inclining men not only to disobey his commands, but, as far as lies in them, to throw him out of the world, and depose him from the throne of heaven.

To the same purpose our Lord speaks, when he tells us, 'No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise

the other: ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' Here our Lord speaks without a parable, and tells us plainly what it is that makes wealth to be so dangerous a possession; namely, because it is the rival of God: and if it once get possession of the mind, it will expel all trust and confidence in God, all regard to faith and religion: 'for ye cannot serve God and Mammon.'

From what has been discoursed on this subject, we may learn where a rich man ought to place his guard: if he is not covetous or uncharitable, if he is not luxurious and intemperate, so far it is well: but above all, let him take heed that the pride and insolence of mind, too common in plentiful circumstances, grow not on him; the pride, I mean, of self-sufficiency, as if he were able to guide and to guard himself through the world, and had not so much need of the care of God over him, as the poor who enjoy nothing: let him learn to know that in riches is no security, and that he wants the protection of Heaven as much as the poorest wretch in the world. A rich man, that has this sense as he ought to have, will in consequence have the other virtues proper to his state: he will be gentle, affable, kind, and charitable; and his spirit, in the height of fortune, will be adorned with the meekness of the gospel of Christ. A man of sense need not go far to learn this submission to God in the highest fortune: our Saviour's argument, that follows close after the text, will teach him the reasonableness of the duty: 'The life,' says he, 'is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.' The utmost riches can do, on the largest concessions made to them, is to provide food and raiment, and such like necessaries and conveniences of life. Put the case then, that, by being master of a great estate, you are master of food and raiment, and can have them in what quantity or quality you please: what then? Have you less reason on this account to depend on God, and to implore his aid? Consider a little: to what purpose serves food? Is it not for the support of life? But can food ward off death? Are you, in all your plenty of provisions, one jot securer against sickness, or any accident that may rob you of your life, than the poorest man? Will not a tile from a house kill a rich man as well as a beggar? If this be the case, is it not very absurd to plume

yourself, and to think of security, because of your plenty, when life itself, which is more than meat, is still exposed, and for which you can have no security, but in the goodness of God? You have many changes of raiment, and the poor has only rags. What then? Will the gout or stone or burning fever pay such respect to fine clothes, as not to approach them? Will health always attend on gold lace and embroidery? If it will, you are right to multiply garments: but if, after all your care for raiment, you must still depend on God, as well as the beggar, for health and strength of body, how ridiculous is the joy over many changes of garments! 'Is not the body more than raiment?' Since then you must trust God for your life and strength, because they are things which no care of your own, no degree of wealth can insure; had you not even as good trust him a little farther, and ease yourself of this unreasonable care for the things of life? From these and the like considerations you may see, that dependence on God is as much the rich man's duty and interest, as it is the poor man's; that to trust God, and to rely on his goodness, is to be rich towards God, and is that sort of riches which will make us easy and happy in this life, and glorious and ever-blessed in that which is to come. By these means we may still enjoy our fortunes; and as our Church has taught us to pray, 'We may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXX.

LUKE, CHAP. XXII.—VERSES 61, 62.

THE fall of St. Peter would be a very melancholy instance of human infirmity, did it not also set before us a signal example of divine mercy, and a triumph of grace over human weakness. It is shown, from various instances, that St. Peter was superior to the other disciples in natural courage, resolution, and faith. When his Master's life was assaulted, he attempted to defend him, and had it been a cause proper for the decision of the sword, he would have died with glory; but his subsequent conduct, when he found the succors of natural courage useless, and the hopes of defence taken away, plainly shows that this courage is not the true source of confidence in spiritual trials, where they only can conquer whose strength is not of man but of God. Peter afterwards (forgetting his earnest profession to our Saviour) thrice denied his Master; and it was not till *the cock crew, and the Lord turned and looked on him,* that he felt his presumption and baseness, and *wept bitterly.* Not long after this we find him boldly preaching Christ before the high priests and elders, and continuing constant under all trials, until he at length suffered martyrdom. Some reflexions suggested by the example of St. Peter. First: confidence and presumption do not argue steadfastness in religion: the courage natural to some men, which gives them great reliance on themselves, being generally attended with great passions that prevent thought and reflexion, is not favorable to true religion, which produces fear of God, and mistrust of ourselves: hence it is that some fierce spirits become despisers of religion. Chris-

tian courage, arising from a sure trust in God, and submission to his will, can alone enable us to act with zeal and firmness under all trials and afflictions. Human courage requires the incitements of glory and success: St. Peter's example shows us that the courage of a Christian is very different from that of a natural man; and that we can only hope to overcome trials and temptations through the assistance of God's Holy Spirit. Secondly: St. Peter's example shows us that we are not to expect this assistance against temptations which are of our own seeking: God has commanded us to avoid temptations, and we cannot hope for his assistance when we are acting in disobedience to his commands. When God warns us to flee from temptations, it shows that we are not able to encounter them; and it is clearly intimated that he will assist us by his grace, not to meet, but to avoid them. A notion that we are above all temptations, and may safely venture among them, is a proof of spiritual pride and presumption: this confidence, if it arise from ourselves, is vain, and if from dependence on God's grace, is unwarranted by Scripture, and contradictory to St. Paul, who admonishes us to *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do:* and if that, which is our strength, is likewise an admonition to be cautious and wary, whence can presumption grow? for if the sense of Christ's assistance must teach us to be humble and watchful, what else can encourage presumption and confidence? Let no man therefore think that he is beyond the power of sin, but let us watch and pray that we enter not into temptation, and implore the Almighty, should he bring our virtue to the trial, that he *would with the temptation also make a way for us to escape.* Thirdly: St. Peter's example shows the great advantage of habitual holiness: those whose minds are not hardened by sin are easily led to repentance. St. Peter's repentance was as remarkable as his fall: the eye of his Lord, though full of compassion, was a sufficient rebuke, and struck

him with undissembled sorrow. St. Peter's case is that of every good man under the same unhappy circumstances. The hardened sinner despises the calls of conscience; but where there is a sense of virtue and religion, they are easily admitted. The rulers of the Jews, though witnesses of all the wonders attending Christ's death and resurrection, did not repent: one compassionate look recovered St. Peter; but the Jews were not convinced though one rose from the dead. Every man may sin, but those only will repent who seriously endeavor after righteousness: the wicked, as they advance in guilt, gradually subdue conscience, till repentance becomes impossible. Fourthly: the sins of the best men are expiated with the greatest sense of sorrow: those who have been long strangers to religion, easily argue themselves into unconcern for their past iniquities; but we cannot think of ourselves and of God as we ought, without feeling the deepest sorrow for our offences. When men are truly concerned, they naturally vent their grief, without considering what profit their sorrow will yield them, like St. Peter in the text. Some have learned to make a trade of repentance, and equally to balance sin and sorrow. But this is not taught us in the gospel, where we learn only how much it is our interest and duty to obey God, and how base and miserable we are when we offend. When we are truly affected with a sense of our sins, we have the best indication that the spirit of religion is still alive within us, and that we are not given up to a reprobate obdurate heart. Lastly: an observation of more general concern naturally offers itself on a view of this case. The gospel was the work of God; and though we were to receive it by the hands of men, our faith was not to be founded in their strength, but in the wisdom and power of God. The disciples, on whom the weight of it was to rest, were distinguished only by their simplicity and honesty. Our Lord elected them, knowing that the weaker the instruments were, the more evidently the hand of God would appear in the mighty works

performed by them. Of all the disciples St. Peter was the most distinguished for spirit and resolution; and we have seen how little able he was of himself to encounter the difficulties that attended the first preaching of the gospel: yet this same man soon after boldly declares before his judges, that Jesus whom they had slain was exalted to the right hand of God. This mighty difference can be ascribed only to that great Spirit before whose coming the disciples were commanded not to enter on their office. If the gospel had been an imposture; if St. Peter had not seen Christ come from the grave, and had not received the power of the Spirit, what would have induced him thus to expose himself? This plainly shows that the hand of God was with him, and is evidence that our faith is the work of God, and not of man. Thus St. Peter's case, considered as one of instruction to ourselves, affords us much encouragement in our spiritual warfare; and in a more general view, as affecting his character as an Apostle of Christ, yields us great confidence in our faith; since through the weakness of the man we evidently discern the power of God, which wrought effectually with him; so that, knowing in whom we have trusted, we need not be ashamed.

DISCOURSE XXX.

LUKE, CHAP. XXII.—VERSES 61, 62.

And the Lord turned, and looked on Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

THE fall of St. Peter would be a very melancholy instance of human infirmity, did it not likewise set before us a signal example of the divine mercy, and of the power of grace triumphing over the weakness of nature. St. Peter seems to have had the greatest share of natural courage and resolution of any of the disciples, and the fullest persuasion of faith. He it was who made the first confession, and said, 'Thou art Christ the Son of the living God;' by which he obtained the promise of his Lord, 'I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.' He it was, who, when his Master's life was assaulted, drew the sword in his defence and smote off the servant's ear; and had left still greater marks of his courage and zeal, had not his Master rebuked his fire, bidding him put up the sword into its place again. When our Lord foretold the flight of his disciples, and that all should be offended because of him, the rest by silence confessed their fear and their shame; Peter only stood forth, and with a courage seeming to be superior to all trials, professed, 'Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.' His Lord again declared unto him, 'Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice:' but Peter, whose heart was conscious of no fear, answers boldly, 'Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.'

As the time of our Lord's sufferings drew near, he retired to

prayer, and made choice of Peter and others to join with him. But here, oppressed with sleep, they forgot themselves and their Master: but soon they were awakened with the noise of those who came to apprehend them, and with the sight of swords and staves. Peter stood to his defence; and had it been a cause proper for the decision of the sword, he had at least died with glory; but he mistook the weapons of his warfare, and knew better how to venture his life in the field, than to resign it at the call of conscience: an evident sign that natural courage is not the true source of confidence in spiritual trials, in which they only can conquer, whose strength is not of man, but of God. No sooner were the hopes of defence taken away, and the succors which natural courage affordeth rendered useless, but Peter's resolution began to fail: he could not indeed totally forget his love to his Master, and therefore he followed him to his trial; but he followed him, as the text expresses it, 'afar off,' and mingled himself in the crowd of servants who attended the chief-priests and elders, hoping by that artifice to pass unsuspected of any acquaintance or familiarity with the person accused. But whether his fear discovered him, which even by the concern it showeth to lie concealed often betrayeth itself, or however else it happened, he was challenged by a damsel, who told him, 'Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee:' Peter denies it, and being again suspected, affirms with an oath, 'I know not the man.' A third time he is questioned, and then, to show his innocence by his resentment of their suspicions, 'he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man.' And now it was that 'the cock crew, and the Lord turned and looked on Peter;' with a look, however, full of tenderness and compassion, that struck Peter to the heart, and brought to his mind his presumption and his baseness: under this confusion he retires from the presence of his Master and from the eyes of the world; and when he thought of himself and of his Lord, 'he wept bitterly.'

Happy tears! and blessed were the fruits that followed them! Not long after this the scene changes again: St. Peter stands in the place of his Master, before the tribunal of the high-priest, summoned to appear for his doctrine at the peril of his life: and now he who denied Christ when he was ques-

tioned by a maid-servant, boldly preaches him before the high-priest and elders, testifying, 'that God had raised up Jesus, whom they slew, and hanged on a tree, and had exalted him with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins:' and when he had been beaten, and let go, he departed, 'rejoicing that he had been counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ:' and thus he continued constant in faith under all trials and afflictions, and at last laid down his life for his Master, with whom he now reigns in glory, distinguished with the brightest crown of martyrdom.

This example of St. Peter affords us many useful reflexions, and many excellent instructions for our conduct and behavior in the course of our lives here; some of which I beg leave to suggest to you. And,

First, hence we may learn that confidence and presumption are very unpromising signs of steadfastness and perseverance in religion. Trust in God is one thing, and trust in ourselves is another; and there is reason to think that they will differ as much in the success that attends them, as they do in the powers on which they are founded.

There is a boldness and intrepidity natural to the temper of some men, which makes them easily undertake and often achieve great things; which gives them such assurance and reliance on themselves, that they overlook the dangers and and difficulties at which others stand amazed, and at the sight of which they find all their powers forsake them. But then great spirits are generally attended with great passions, which by turns usurp the dominion, and leave little room for thought or reflexion; so that a cool head and a warm heart seems to be one of the rarest compositions in nature. How applicable such tempers are to religion, may be known by considering that the first principles of true religion are a fear of God, and a mistrust of ourselves, which will not easily insinuate into a mind that fears nothing, and is full of self-sufficiency. Hence it is that some fierce spirits set up for despisers of religion, as if even to fear God were too mean a condescension in a man of courage.

But were such men once entered into the ways of holiness,

it may be thought perhaps that the same warmth which presses them on to great attempts, would soon make them eminently virtuous; since courage and resolution are the likeliest means to carry us to the greatest heights in religion. Such indeed are Christian courage and resolution which arise from a sure trust in God, and a perfect submission to his will, which enable us not only to act with zeal, but to bear the disappointments we meet with an unshaken firmness of mind. But when men set out on their own bottom, they will soon be offended and turn back: glory and success are the proper incitement of human courage; reproach and afflictions the necessary exercise of Christian fortitude. When St. Peter was surrounded with swords and staves, he was nothing dismayed, his heart and his hand went together in the cause of God. But yet he who could fight for his religion, could not suffer for it. This shows that the courage of a Christian is very different from that of the natural man; that it arises from other considerations, and is supported by other hopes and expectations: and it is in vain for you to promise yourselves a superiority under trials and temptations, unless you lay the right foundation, by imploring the aid and assistance of God's holy Spirit, whose province only it is to confirm the faithful to the end.

Secondly, from this example of St. Peter we may learn also what little reason there is to promise ourselves success against temptations which are of our own seeking. St. Peter had warning given him, and was told by one whose word he might have taken, that he was not able to undergo the trial which he seemed so much to despise. But try he would, and learnt to know his own weakness in his miscarriage.

God knows our strength better than we ourselves do; and therefore, when he has warned us to avoid the occasions of sin, and to fly from the presence of the enemy, it is presumption to think ourselves able to stand the attack, and our preparations to meet the danger must be vain and ineffectual. When we strive not lawfully, even victory is dishonorable, and no success can justify disobedience to orders: and where our strength is not our own, but is derived to us from the great Captain of our salvation, it is impossible we should prosper whilst we disobey his authority, unless we can suppose that he will enable

us to act in contempt of his commands. When therefore we court the dangers and temptations which the Spirit of God has warned us to flee from, we fight without commission, we are no longer the soldiers of Christ, or have any pretence to expect support from him in our undertakings. The promise of the Spirit was given to comfort us in doing the work of God, and his assistance is granted to enable us to perform it. And whilst we are doing the work of our Father, we have no reason to doubt of proper encouragement; but when we step out of the road of our duty, and form to ourselves designs not authorised by the word of God, what ground have we to look for the aid of God's Spirit? which aid is no where promised to enable us to effect whatever our own hearts prompt us to undertake, but only to encourage our obedience to the laws and precepts of the gospel. When God warns us to flee from temptations, it is sufficient evidence to us that we are not able to encounter them, and a clear intimation of his will that he intends to assist us by his grace, not to meet them, but to avoid them; which of itself is a task difficult enough to exercise the courage and constancy of a Christian. When you endeavor to avoid what God has commanded to be avoided, you act under the assurance and protection of his grace; but if you face about and dare the temptation, your courage grows to be contumacy and disobedience, and you have no title to the promises of the gospel. An imagination that we are above all temptations, and may safely venture into their company, is always a dangerous symptom, and shows that spiritual pride and presumption have got the upper hand of Christian courage and humility. Men are apt to think that caution and fear are only necessary for young beginners; but that established virtue is licensed to take a nearer view of sin, and may enter its quarters without any danger from the infection: but whence arises this confidence? If from themselves, it is vain; if from a dependence on the experienced strength of God's grace, the conclusion is no where warranted by Scripture, and is a direct contradiction to St. Paul's inference drawn from the same principles, who thus admonishes all Christians; 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.' Our whole ability depending on the aid of God's

Spirit is, in the Apostle's way of reasoning, an argument for fear and trembling: and if he had the Spirit of God, what spirit must they have, who, in contempt of this apostolical rebuke to presumption, thus exhort themselves and others: Be bold and fear not, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do! St. Paul did not speak to babes in Christ Jesus only, but to those also who had attained to the fulness of stature in Christ. The best thing the most confirmed Christian can say for himself is, that God worketh in him both to will and to do; and if even this be a reason for fear and trembling, if this, which is your strength, is likewise your admonition to be cautious and wary, whence can presumption grow? For if the sense of your strength in Christ Jesus must teach you to be modest and humble, and always on your guard, what else is there that can encourage you to be bold and confident? Let no man therefore think that his trial is over, or that he is got beyond the power of sin and temptation: the enemy will watch all your unguarded moments, and your security and presumption will be his encouragement to attempt your ruin: 'Watch therefore and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.' And if the will of God be that your virtue should be brought to the trial, if he calls you to the combat, look up to him for aid, imploring of his goodness, 'that he would with the temptation also make a way for you to escape.'

Thirdly, from the example of St. Peter we may learn how great the advantages of regular and habitual holiness are. Good Christians, though they may fall like other men through passion, or presumption, or other infirmities, yet the way to their repentance is more open and easy; their minds, not being hardened by sin, are awakened by the gentlest calls, and the sense of virtue revives on the first motion and suggestions of conscience. St. Peter fell, and his fall was very shameful; but his repentance was as surprising and remarkable as his fall. Whilst he was in the height of his rage for being suspected to be a disciple of Christ, whilst he was abjuring him with oaths and imprecations, one look of his Lord laid all the storm, and melted him into the tears and sorrows of repentance. The same minute saw him the most audacious sinner and the most humble penitent; he committed the fault, and begged pardon for

it, almost in the same breath. There was no need of terrifying judgments to awaken his mind to a sense of his iniquity: the eye of his Lord, though full of compassion, was a sufficient rebuke; it struck him with a sorrow not to be dissembled, and therefore 'he went out, and wept bitterly.' St. Peter's case is the case of every good man under the same unhappy circumstances. The hardened sinner goes on from sin to sin, despises the calls of conscience, refuses to hearken to the judgments of God, and obstinately perishes in the error of his way: but where there is a sense of virtue and religion, sin can never keep possession long; no sooner does the passion cool, and conscience begin to speak, but the heart travails with repentance, and feels the pangs of godly sorrow. How different were the calls to repentance which the rulers of the Jews had on the death of Christ, and yet how different the success of those calls! When he hung on the cross, they saw all nature thrown into convulsions; the earth trembled, the sun was darkened, and the vail of the temple was rent in two; yet still they pursued their malice, and set a guard on his sepulchre, hoping at least that the grave, so assisted, would hold him fast; but when this failed them, and their own trusty watch declared to them the wonder of his resurrection, they relented not; but throwing off all shame, they suborned the guards to witness a lie, giving out that his disciples had stolen him away by night. One compassionate look recovered St. Peter; but the Jews were not convinced, though one arose from the dead. A good man may be mistaken, surprised, misled; but the first returns of thought, the first interval he has of cool reflexion, shows him his error, and hastens his return to the obedience of holiness. This is a great security; for every man may sin; but those only will repent, who sincerely endeavor after righteousness. The wicked, as they advance in iniquity, do more and more subdue their conscience, till even repentance itself becomes impossible.

Fourthly, you may observe that the sins of the best men are expiated with the greatest sense of sorrow and affliction. It is easy for men, who have been long strangers to a sense of religion, to argue themselves into an unconcernedness for their past iniquities; and imagine that, if they do but pursue their resolutions of living virtuously for the time to come, it is of

little moment to trouble themselves with the remembrance of what is past and gone; since God requires nothing but their amendment, and even sorrow and repentance are no farther valuable, than as they tend to reformation. I shall not enter into speculations on this subject; let men enjoy their reasonings; but this I say, it is impossible to have a sense of religion, to think of God and ourselves as we ought to do, without being affected with the deepest sorrow for our offences. When men are truly concerned, they do not consider what they are to get by their tears, or what profit their sorrow will yield: the soul must vent its grief; and godly sorrow is as truly the natural expression of an inward pain as worldly sorrow, however they differ in their causes and objects. St. Peter, when he went out and wept bitterly, did not stay to consider whether he ought to weep or no; or to reflect what use his tears would be to him: his heart was too full for such reflexions; he saw the goodness of his Lord and his own baseness, and his grief came as naturally into his eyes, as when a man bemoans the loss of a father or a mother. Some indeed have learnt how to make a trade of repentance, and can balance sin and sorrow as exactly as a merchant does his accounts: and repentance is indeed their richest merchandise. But the gospel has taught us no such art: there only we learn how gracious our God is, how much it is our duty and interest to obey; and from thence we learn how base and how miserable we are when we offend. What is beyond this is the work of nature, which will ever start and grow afflicted at the sight of misery, and knows how to lament its own afflictions without a guide. When therefore we find ourselves truly affected with the sense of our sins, and in good earnest lament our disobedience and ingratitude to God, we have the best indication that we can have, that the spirit of religion is still alive within us, and that we are not given up to a reprobate obdurate heart.

Lastly, there is one observation of a more general concern, that naturally offers itself on the view of this case. The instruction of this example to private Christians is very great; but yet there seems to me to be something more intended in the transmitting this history to all ages in the sacred writings.

The gospel was the work of God; and though we were to

receive it by the hands of men, yet was our faith to be founded not in the strength or policy of man, but in the power and wisdom of God: for this reason 'God chose the weak things of the world to confound the strong.' The disciples, on whom the weight of the gospel was to rest, and on whose management the success seemed to depend, were men of no distinguished characters; their simplicity and honesty were their best commendation: these our Lord elected, well knowing, the weaker the instruments were, the more evidently the hand of God would appear in the mighty things performed by them. Among these St. Peter plainly had the greatest spirit and the strongest resolution; his readiness and vivacity distinguished him in every step; he was the mouth of the Apostles, and always ready to undertake and execute the commands of his Lord. If there was any of the number that could be thought capable of entering into and managing so great a design as the propagating a new religion in the world, it was St. Peter: he therefore is called to the trial. And how able he was of himself to encounter the difficulties that were to attend the gospel in every step, you have already seen. Had the gospel been left to have been conducted by him merely, it is probable that the fame of it would not have reached our times. And yet this same man, not many weeks after, appears before the tribunal of the magistrates, preaches to his judges, and testifies that of a truth Jesus was the Christ, and that whom they slew, and hanged on a tree, God had raised from the dead, and exalted him to the right hand of his glory. Whence this mighty difference? or to what can it be ascribed but to that great Spirit for whose coming their Lord commanded them to wait in Jerusalem, and not to enter on their office till they should receive power from on high? If the gospel was an imposture, and if Christ died to rise no more, what gave this fresh courage to St. Peter? Had he more confidence in a dead man than in his Master whilst on earth? If he had not seen Christ come from the grave, nor received the power of the Spirit, what could move him to expose himself for the sake of Christ, for whose sake whilst on earth, and whilst the hopes of his being the Son of God were strong, he dared not to expose himself?

This plainly shows that the hand of God was with him, and

is an evidence to us that our faith is the work of God, and not of man.

And thus, whether we consider St. Peter's case as an instruction to ourselves, it affords us many useful lessons and many encouragements to direct and support us in our spiritual warfare; or whether we consider it in a more general view, and as affecting his character as he was a minister of the gospel, and an apostle of Christ Jesus, it yields us a great assurance and confidence in our faith, whilst, through the weakness of the man we evidently discern the power of God, which wrought effectually with him; so that, knowing in whom we have trusted, we need not be ashamed.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXXI.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XIV.—VERSES 1, 2.

INTRODUCTION, showing how it came to pass that, whilst others were rejoicing in the hopes of having a great prophet among them, Herod alone was perplexed and dismayed; and how, when there were such various accounts of the great personage who had appeared, he alone took up with the most improbable of them all, and for which there was not the least foundation: the reason of this was his guilty conscience: he had murdered a holy man to please a lewd woman; and no sooner did he hear that there was one in the country who wrought miracles, but he concluded that John the Baptist was come from the grave to take vengeance for his iniquities.

The use here made of this passage of holy Scripture, is to set forth such considerations as naturally arise from it, and are applicable for the direction of ourselves.

First, we may observe from hence the great force and efficacy of conscience. It is reasonable to suppose that, if God intended us for his service, and designed us for another state of happiness or misery, according to our present good or ill behavior, he should make himself known to us by some clear manifestation, and should promulge the laws which were to be the rule of our obedience, so that all might know and acknowlege their duty. There are many demonstrations of his existence in the works of nature and the operations of our own minds: but the plainest of these proofs sometimes escape the lower classes of mankind, who are not in the habit of exercising their reason: but then there is an internal proof of a Deity arising from con-

science, and reflexion on the good or evil we do, which amounts to the fullest declaration of the power of God, and is the completest promulgation of his law to mankind that can be desired; for it is made at every man's door, nay, in his very heart. As speculation helps us to other proofs, so does it also help some persons to get rid of them: a man of subtle wit may refine on any subject, till there be little left for the mind to rest on with any satisfaction; but this proof of a superior Being, to whom we are accountable, which dwells in every man's breast, no art or subtilty can ever expel. As long as men continue to judge of their actions; as long as good or evil is attended with peace and satisfaction, or anxiety and fear; so long it will be plain that God has not left himself without a witness: this point enlarged on.

Secondly, the moral law is promulged in the same manner to every rational creature: the work of the law is written in the heart, as the conscience beareth witness, and the thoughts, which either accuse or excuse. The promulgation here is stronger than that of any human laws, for it is renewed to every individual; and the meaning is so preserved, that nothing but great skill, joined with little honesty, can pervert or obscure it; for the rebukes of conscience will, sooner or later, restore its true sense to the law, which was darkened by false reason serving the inclinations of a sinful heart. An honest man would grieve to see how the plainest laws have been treated by corrupt casuists; particularly in the obligation of an oath, of which the text furnishes us with an instance: but conscience proves generally an honester casuist, and pulls off the thin disguise. Herod had promised with an oath to give whatever she should ask to the daughter of Herodias: and though he was troubled when she asked the head of John the Baptist, yet, *for his oath's sake,* &c. *he commanded it to be given her;* calmly dipping his hands in blood, under the comfort of a conscientious regard for his oath! But the scene is quickly changed: Herod is alarmed

at the fame of one who wrought miracles in the country; he starts at the news, and cries out, *This is John the Baptist, he is risen from the dead.* This natural sense of good and evil, guarded against false interpretations by the power of conscience, is a great justification of God's goodness and equity in promulging his laws, and making our duty clear and evident.

Thirdly; we may observe what care the wise Author of our nature has taken, not only to manifest himself and his laws to us, but likewise to secure our obedience, and thereby our eternal welfare. It is thought a disadvantage to religion, that its hopes and fears are so distant, whilst the temptations to sin are so constantly present with us. To balance this, though the rewards and punishments of religion are at such a distance, yet its hopes and fears are always present, and influence our happiness even here, as much or more than any other good or evil that can befal us. As little as a man may think now of the consequence of his iniquity, a very short time, or a very trivial accident, may open a passage to other reflexions: this instanced in the case of Joseph's brethren, who sold him for a slave. Misfortunes may befal the good as well as the bad; but under the same circumstances there is a mighty difference in their sufferings, arising from their different reflexions: this topic enlarged on. So that, if we consider the case fairly, we shall find, that though the final rewards of virtue, and punishments of vice, are reserved to another time and place, yet there are such annexed to them here, in the very frame and constitution of our minds, as are sufficient to determine the choice of a reasonable man. Let those who pretend to doubts respecting a future state, consider whether that defect, which they suppose to be in the foundation of religion, is not supplied by what is now spoken of: for, were they ever so certain of a future state, their duty would consist in those very things which their own reason requires of them, and which are necessary to that peace of mind on which all their happiness depends. Concluding exhortation: as we

value reason, the comforts of this life, and the glories of the next, let us take heed to preserve innocence and virtue, or that godliness, which, as the Apostle tells us, *is great gain, having the promise of this life, and of that which is to come.*

DISCOURSE XXXI.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XIV.—VERSES 1, 2.

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist: he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him.

WHETHER this thought was first started by Herod himself or no, is not very certain: the accounts given of it by St. Matthew and St. Mark make it probable that Herod was the first who supposed Jesus to be that John Baptist risen from the dead, whom he had cruelly and wantonly put to death in prison. St. Luke's account makes the case rather to be, that the several reports and opinions of others concerning Jesus, either that he was Elias, or one of the old prophets, or John the Baptist from the dead, were brought to Herod, and that he was in great perplexity and concern about them. But be this as it will, whether he imposed on himself, or was imposed on by others by this vain and improbable story, yet evident it is, how far his imagination was possessed, and his reason weighed down by guilty fear; and how easily he believed whatever seemed to threaten that punishment, which his conscience told him was his due. How came it to pass, that whilst others were blessing themselves with the hopes of having a great prophet among them, Herod alone was perplexed and dismayed? or when there were such various accounts of this person, some saying that he was Elias, others that he was one of the old prophets, and others that he was John the Baptist, how came Herod to take up with the most improbable account of all, and for which there was not the least foundation? The Jews had from ancient prophecies, however mistaken, an ex-

pectation that Elias should come, or some of the old prophets; and those who were of that opinion were in the common error, which was countenanced by tradition, and the prevailing interpretation of the prophecies. To their expectation the character and person of our blessed Saviour did very well answer: he was a preacher of righteousness, and mighty in signs and wonders: such was Elias, such were the old prophets: they had read of them, what they now saw performed by Jesus; and their persuasion being allowed them, that Elias, or one of the old prophets should come, the words and works of Jesus tended extremely to confirm them in the opinion that he was the person whom they expected. But with respect to John the Baptist the case is quite otherwise; there was no ground to build this imagination on; there was neither tradition nor prophecy to support it: John indeed was a just man, and a preacher of righteousness, and had been barbarously murdered; and so had many before him, who never returned again from their graves: and what better reason was there to expect that he should? Besides, suppose it probable that he was to come, yet still it was improbable that this was the person: their characters and offices were very different: John went about baptizing; but we are told expressly that Jesus baptized no man. Jesus wrought many miracles; but of John it is recorded in holy writ that he wrought no miracle. But Herod minded none of these things; he had a motive that weighed more with him on the other side, a motive which shut out all reason and argument; it was his guilty conscience told him this was John the Baptist. He had murdered the holy man to please a lewd woman; and no sooner did he hear that there was one in the country who wrought miracles, but he concluded the Baptist was come from the grave, armed with power to take vengeance for his iniquities and his own wrongs. 'This is John the Baptist,' says Herod: 'he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him.'

The use I intend to make of this passage of holy Scripture is to set before you such considerations as naturally arise from it, and are proper for the government and direction of ourselves. And,

First, you may observe from hence the great force and efficacy of conscience.

It is reasonable to suppose that, if God intended men for his own service, and designed them for another state of happiness and misery after this life, according to their good or ill behavior in it, that he should make himself known to them by some clear and plain manifestation; and promulge the laws which were to be the rule of their obedience, in such manner that all should know and acknowlege their duty. Were men left destitute of these necessary assistances, there could be no equity in requiring obedience, no justice in punishing disobedience. There are many demonstrations to be had of the existence of a Deity from the works of nature, and from the operations of our own minds; but the plainest of these proofs do sometimes escape the lower part of mankind, who, being constantly taken up in the servile employments of life, do not exercise their reason so far as to come to the conclusion, which is but one remove distant from the objects they every day converse with. And though, as the Psalmist speaks, 'the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy work;' though 'day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowlege;' yet some there are, who, for want of attention, hear not this still voice of nature, and are slow to apprehend the glory which the heavens declare, or to discover the hand of the Creator in the works of the firmament which they every day behold. But then there is an internal proof of a Deity arising from conscience, and the reflexion of the mind on the good or evil we do, which amounts to the fullest declaration of the power of God, and is the completest promulgation of his law to mankind that can be desired or expected. In all civil cases a king is sufficiently proclaimed, and a law is sufficiently promulged, when either is done according to custom in some public and solemn manner; for it being impossible to give every man concerned particular notice, the necessity of the case requires that every man should at his peril take notice of the public declaration. But with respect to the authority of God, and the common laws of morality, such care is taken, that the promulgation is made at every man's own door, nay, in his very heart. The sense which men have of good and evil, the hopes and fears

which naturally arise in consequence of the good or ill they do, are such demonstrations, and so homely applied to every man's understanding, of the obedience owing to a superior Being, that nothing can invalidate.

As speculation helps us to other proofs of the power and authority of our Maker, so does it help some also to get rid of them. It is an easy matter for a man of a subtle wit to refine so far on any subject, till there shall be hardly any thing left for the mind to rest on with satisfaction and assurance. But this proof of a superior Being, to whom we are accountable, which dwells in every man's breast, no art or subtilty can ever expel. As long as men continue to judge of the good and evil of their actions, as long as such reflexions are attended in the innocent with peace and satisfaction of mind, and in the guilty with fear and anxiety; so long it will be plain that God hath not left himself without witness, but that there are as many evidences of his power and authority as there are rational beings in the world: and there is this peculiar to this evidence, that it is strongest and most irresistible in those who in interest are most concerned to suppress it. The innocent have little temptation to plead to the jurisdiction of the court; they are the guilty who want that and other artifices to decline the power of the judge: but in the present case the fears which surround the guilty are so many undoubted proofs and records of the judge's authority; and his mind, conscious of all those fears, speaks to him in the language which Festus used to St. Paul; 'Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? Unto Cæsar shalt thou go.'

Secondly, in the same manner the moral law is promulged to every rational creature: the work of the law is written in the heart, as the conscience beareth witness, and the thoughts, which either accuse or excuse. The promulgation, in this case, is stronger than that of any human laws, which, how publicly and solemnly soever they are declared at first, are often worn out by length of time, or grow dark and obscure, and stand in need of an authoritative exposition to silence the contentions arising from the different acceptations of the rule. But here the law is renewed to every man, and the sense and meaning of it so preserved, that nothing but great ability and skill, joined

with little honesty, can pervert or obscure it; and then only for a time; since the rebukes of conscience will sooner or later restore the true sense to the law, which was darkened by the shades of false reason serving the inclinations of a corrupted heart. It would grieve an honest man to see how the plainest laws have been treated by corrupt casuists, who, to serve the vile purposes of themselves or others, have made the commandment of God of none effect by their traditions; who have played rule against rule, and duty against duty, till both have been lost. This might be shown in every case, but in none more apparently than in the instance which the text furnishes of the obligation of an oath, which is made to bind, or not to bind, just as the corrupt purposes require. But though these daubings with untempered mortar serve often to deceive the simple, and to hide their plain duty from their eyes; yet when they come to reflect coolly on their past actions, conscience proves a far honester casuist, and pulls off the thin disguise; and the man trembles at the remembrance of those very things which he committed under the pretence of a religious care and disposition. Herod, it seems, had promised with an oath to give the daughter of Herodias whatsoever she would ask; and though he was troubled when she demanded the head of John the Baptist, yet, as it is particularly remarked by the Evangelist, 'for his oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.' Happy hypocrite! how serenely does he dip his hands in guiltless blood, and how calmly does he sit under the comfort of a conscientious regard to his oath! But see, the scene is quickly changed; Herod is alarmed with the fame of one who wrought miracles in the country: he starts at the news; he cries out, 'This is John the Baptist, he is risen from the dead.' This sense of good and evil, which is natural to rational minds, and is thus guarded against false and corrupt interpretations by the power of conscience, is a great justification of the goodness and equity of God, in taking care to promulge his laws sufficiently to all who are bound to obey them, and to make their duty clear and evident to them; without which we should not be able to discern him to be the righteous Judge of the world, in which character we are chiefly concerned to know him.

Thirdly, we may observe from hence, what care the wise Author of our nature has taken, not only to manifest himself and his laws to us, but likewise to secure our obedience, and thereby our eternal happiness and welfare. It is thought a great disadvantage to religion, that it has only such distant hopes and fears to support it; and it is true that the great objects of our hopes and fears are placed on the other side the grave, whilst the temptations to sin meet us in every turn, and are almost constantly present with us. But then to balance this it must be considered, that though the punishments and rewards of religion are at such a distance, yet the hopes and fears are always present, and influence the happiness of our lives here, as much, and often much more, than any other good or evil which can befal us. The peace of mind which flows from doing right, the fear, the anxiety, the torment which attend the guilty, will inevitably determine the condition of men to happiness or misery even in this life. And no man, whatever his present contempt for religion may be, can be secure that he is not by his wickedness drawing down on himself the greatest misery that man is capable of sustaining. As little as you think now of the consequence of your iniquity, a very little time, or a very trivial accident, may open the passage to other reflexions. The sons of Jacob had no remorse, when they sold their brother to be a slave; they had delivered themselves from a foolish fear they had entertained, that he would one day be greater than they, and their case was much mended by the riddance they had of him: but the very first misfortune that befel them, a little rough usage in a strange country, awakened their guilty fears, 'and they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come on us.' Misfortunes may befal the good as well as the evil, for righteous men have no promise to secure them in this life against the common calamities incident to it; but then, under the same circumstances, there is a mighty difference in their sufferings, arising from the different reflexions their several cases afford. The innocent man, who finds nothing to charge himself with as the cause of his calamity, submits to it as to an accident of life, to which he always knew himself subject, or

as a dispensation of the providence of God towards him, whose kindness he has no reason to mistrust. But when any calamity overtakes the sinner, and setting aside at present what his sins may deserve, even as a man he is subject to the casualties of life; and whenever they overtake him, will it be possible for him to think that they are not the punishment of those sins which, he is conscious, have deserved them? And what weight must this add to his woe! how tormenting must the thought be, that all his sufferings are effects of God's wrath, and the presage of greater woe to come! Innocence may sometimes steal a man from the sense of his pain, and his peace of mind make him forget the sorrow and affliction of his heart: but guilt has no resting-place; it raises every faculty of the soul to increase the present misery. How does the memory of what is past, and the fear of what is to come, give an edge and sharpness to affliction! How does the imagination work to paint in all the colors of terror the sad doom that is expected! It is this only that renders the afflictions of life truly insupportable; for 'the spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?' So that, if we consider the case fairly, we shall find, that though the final reward of virtue, and punishment of vice, are reserved to another time and place; yet there are such rewards and punishments annexed to them here, and which have their foundation in the very frame and constitution of our minds, as are sufficient to determine the choice of a wise or reasonable man. And if some, who pretend to doubts and uncertainties concerning a future state, are serious, let them consider whether that defect, as they suppose, in the foundation of religion be not supplied by what we now speak of: for were they ever so certain of a future state, their duty would consist in those very things which their own reason requires of them, and which are absolutely necessary to the peace of their minds, on which all their happiness depends. Allow them then their doubts, will the consequence be, that they may safely go contrary to their own reason, and the measures of their present happiness? How then does this uncertainty affect the practice of virtue, since the certainty requires nothing of us but what our reason and present interest will teach us without it? And this shows how effectually God has laid before us the knowlege of his law,

together with proper and sufficient motives to secure our obedience.

To conclude then: as you value the use of that reason which distinguishes you from the creatures of a lower rank, as you value the comforts of this life, and the glories of the next, (and if these arguments will not weigh, there is nothing more to add,) take heed to preserve innocence and virtue, which fill up the character of that godliness, which, the Apostle tells us, 'is great gain, having the promise of this life, and of that which is to come.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXXII.

ROMANS, CHAP. VI.—VERSE 21.

THOUGH the hopes introduced by the gospel are fitted to support and encourage virtue and true religion, and are only to be truly enjoyed by those who make a title to them by the innocency of their lives; yet they have been perverted to ill purposes by such as, hating to be reformed by the precepts of the gospel, are willing to put their sins under the protection of its promises: that this policy prevailed early in the church is shown from several passages of St. Paul. To prevent the use which ill-disposed men were ready to make of God's goodness to sinners, who imagine their iniquities to be privileged, since grace had so abounded; the Apostle in this chapter enters into the question, whether the hopes of the gospel are reconcileable to a continuance in sin; showing by various arguments the complete inconsistency of a state of grace and a state of sin; from whence he appeals to conscience and reason against the presumptuous conceit that the Son of God could be the minister of sin, or that the gospel could countenance iniquities of which nature was ever ashamed, and which the common reason of mankind condemned: *What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.*

These words suggest to our consideration several particulars. I. That the shame and remorse which attend on sin and guilt, arise from natural impressions on the mind of man. Experience teaches us that we can no more direct by our choice the sensations of our mind than we can those of the body:

when the fire burns, flesh and blood must feel pain; and a rational mind, compelled to act against its own conviction, must ever be afflicted. These natural connexions are unalterably fixed by the Author of nature, to be the means of our preservation: this point enlarged on. Hence it is evident that the mental pain and grief which we suffer from a sense of having done ill, flow from the constitution of our nature, as we are rational agents: nor can there be a stronger argument of God's utter aversion to sin, than his having given us such a nature, that we cannot be reconciled to it ourselves: hence it is that profligate sinners fly to any excess that may help them to forget themselves, and hide them from the light of reason: but there is no remedy: as long as we have the power of thinking, so long must we think ill of ourselves when we do ill: the only cure for such uneasiness is to live without thought; for we can never enjoy the happiness of a brute, till we have sunk into the same degree of understanding.

It may indeed be said that there have been some profligate sinners who have gone through life without discovering any uneasiness on account of their guilt: so there have been instances of men who could play with fire without showing any sense of pain: but neither will the art of one be an argument against the sense of feeling, nor the obduracy of the other be a proof against the natural sense of a rational mind: this point enlarged and illustrated.

II. The expectation of punishment for sin is the result of the reason given to us: *the end of those things is death.* There are no certain principles from which we can infer the sort of punishment designed by God for sinners: reason has left us in the dark, and revelation has not cleared up this secret. The representations of Scripture on this head are metaphorical; the images strong and full of horror, leading to the certain conclusion that endless misery will be the lot of the wicked; but they do not satisfy the curiosity of inquisitive persons. The

opinions of all nations on this subject prove the natural expectation of punishment for iniquity; nor does it signify if men have entertained mistaken notions about the kind of it: this point enlarged on. The power of conscience, and the fear which every sinner feels, are great evidences of the general expectation of judgment to come. But this argument need not be pressed; the fact of this expectation is hardly disputed: we are however told that it is the effect of weakness and superstition. The question then is, whether this common sense of nature is derived from infirmity of mind, or whether it is the result of right reason.

If the former of these opinions be a just one, another conclusion must be allowed, namely, that sin shall not be punished. Now whatever can be said in maintenance of this assertion, must resolve itself into one or other of these propositions; either that sin does not deserve to be punished; or that God has no means of punishing it.

As to the first, no one has yet been found an advocate for wickedness: even those who seem unwilling to admit a state of future rewards and punishments, never use the plea that sin deserves no punishment; but the only reason why they think it will not be punished, is, because they have no notion of a future state. Could they be persuaded of this, they would have no doubt regarding the sinner's condition in it. The truth then of this maxim being supposed, viz. that sin *is deserving* of punishment, we are led to the conclusion that sin *shall be* punished: for what reason can be assigned why that should not be done which reason tells us is fit to be done? Why should God act contrary to what he leads us to suppose agreeable to his wisdom and justice? The latter proposition therefore is considered, viz. whether God has any means of punishing sin: and it is on this that all hopes of impunity are built: not that all who hope for impunity are so absurd as to suppose that God wants the power to punish, but they conceive that man has no

relation to any state of being except in this life only; and that when he dies, all his hopes and fears die with him. But by what principles of reason are men led into this supposition? That God might have provided another state after this, a state also of retribution, no one can doubt, who believes in the being of a God. If he has ordered it otherwise, it was because it seemed best to his wisdom: but how could it seem best to leave no means of making a distinction between virtue and vice, by suitable rewards and punishments, and yet to teach us, by the light of reason, that it is highly suitable to his wisdom and justice to make such distinction? That he does not make it in this world is evident: if then nothing remains hereafter, there is no justice with the Most High; the wicked have the advantage, and the righteous hath *cleansed his heart in vain*. But can this be agreeable to his wisdom, who himself hath taught us to think it disagreeable to all the rules of reason and justice? Those who think so, may perhaps have some notion of an overruling fate and necessity; or if they go so far as to think there is a rational being, who is the author and governor of all things, yet can they hardly allow him any thing but will, and power, and understanding; for they leave no room for the exercise of moral attributes. If we can draw any conclusion from our own feelings, we are accountable creatures: our natural notions of God point him out as our judge: on our own part we find reason and freedom, which make us fit subjects for judgment; on the part of God we find wisdom, and mercy, and justice, and every other perfection: and if after all we are not to be judged, there must be something very wrong in these expectations of mankind. But there is one step more to take, and to show,

III. That these common notions are the foundation of all religion, and must be supposed and admitted in revealed religion, and therefore cannot be contradicted by it.

Some there have been, who, finding no hopes for impunity

to sinners under the light of reason and nature, have taken shelter in revelation; not desiring to correct and reform their vices, but to enjoy them, and yet to hide them from the wrath to come: these are great extollers of the mercy of God in the gospel; great assertors of the unbounded merits of Christ's blood; making it a reproach to those who teach that the hopes of Christians can be frustrated after his atonement; imagining that by this they do honor to God, and pay great regard to their redeemer. But would they consider, they would find that they are offering to God the sacrifice of fools, whilst they divest him of all his other moral attributes in compliment to his mercy; representing him as a good-natured indolent being, unconcerned at what is going on, and prepared equally to receive the righteous and the sinner. This topic enlarged on: and the same may be said of the Redeemer. Not necessary to show at length how inconsistent these notions are with the true doctrine of the gospel: all its precepts, all its representations, all the hopes and fears proposed to Christians, teach us a different lesson, and declare, *that God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.* This is the gospel doctrine; nor can a true revelation possibly teach otherwise; for God cannot contradict himself, nor gainsay by his prophets that common light of reason which he planted in men to be their guide: natural religion is the foundation of revelation, which may supply the defects of nature, but can never overthrow its established principles: this topic enlarged on. The conclusion is, that without holiness no man shall see God; that Christ, by redeeming us from sin itself, redeemed us from the punishment of sin; and if we refuse the redemption from sin, we never can partake of the redemption from its punishment, &c.

DISCOURSE XXXII.

ROMANS, CHAP. VI.—VERSE 21.

What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

THOUGH the hopes introduced by the gospel of Christ are in themselves fitted to support and encourage virtue and true religion, and are only to be truly enjoyed by those who make a title to them by the innocency of their lives; yet they have been perverted to very ill purposes by such as, hating to be reformed by the precepts of the gospel, are willing nevertheless to put their sins under the protection of the glorious promises contained in it. This policy prevailed so soon in the church, that we find the Apostle stating the pretence, and rejecting it with indignation, in the first verses of this chapter: 'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?' In the chapter before this of the text, he sets forth the exceeding great benefits we receive through Jesus Christ: that 'being justified by faith, we have peace with God.' That 'God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' That 'being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.' That 'as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.' To prevent the use which ill-disposed men were ready to make of this great goodness of God towards sinners, imagining their iniquities to be privileged, since so much grace had been extended to them, the Apostle in this chapter enters into the question, whether the hopes of the gospel are reconcileable to a continuance in sin; and shows by many arguments

drawn from the profession, the state, and the condition of a Christian, that a state of grace and a state of sin are as inconsistent as life and death: since every Christian is buried with Christ 'by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.' From these reasons he proceeds to others, not of less moment, appealing to the sense of conscience and the voice of reason against the presumptuous conceit which made the Son of God the minister of sin, and the gospel to give countenance to the iniquities of which nature was ever ashamed, and against which the common reason of mankind had passed sentence of condemnation: 'What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.'

These words will suggest to our consideration the following particulars:

First, that the shame and remorse which attend on sin and guilt arise from the natural impressions on the mind of man.

Secondly, that the expectation of punishment for sin is the result of the reason given unto us.

Thirdly, that these common notions are the foundation of all religion, and therefore must be supposed and admitted in revealed religion, and cannot be contradicted by it.

First, that the shame and remorse which attend on sin and guilt arise from the natural impressions on the mind of man.

It is certain from experience that we can no more direct by our choice the sensations of our mind, than we can those of the body; when the fire burns, flesh and blood must feel pain; and a rational mind compelled to act against its own conviction must ever grieve and be afflicted. These natural connexions are unalterably fixed by the Author of nature, and established to be means of our preservation. We are taught by the sense of pain to avoid things hurtful or destructive to the body; and the torments and anxiety of mind, which follow so close and so constantly at the heels of sin and guilt, are placed as guardians to our innocence, as centinels to give early notice of the approach of evil, which threatens the peace and comfort of our lives. If we are perfect masters of the sensations of our mind, if reflexion be so much under command, that when we say,

Come, it cometh, when we say, Go, it goeth; how is it that so many suffer so much from the uneasy thoughts and suggestions of their own hearts, when they need only speak the word and be whole? Whence the self-conviction, the self-condemnation of sinners, whence the foreboding thoughts of judgment to come, the sad expectations of divine vengeance, and the dread of future misery, if the sinner has it in his power to bid these melancholy thoughts retire, and can when he pleases sit down enjoying his iniquities in peace and tranquillity?

These considerations make it evident that the pain and grief of mind which we suffer from a sense of having done ill, flow from the very constitution of our nature, as we are rational agents. Nor can we conceive a greater argument of God's utter irreconcileableness to sin, than that he has given us such a nature that we can never be reconciled to it ourselves. We never like it in others where we have no interest in the iniquity, nor long approve of it in ourselves when we have. The hours of cool reflexion are the sinner's mortification, for vice can never be happy in the company of reason; which is the true cause why profligate sinners fly to any excess that may help them to forget themselves, and hide them from the light of reason, which, whenever it ceases to be the glory of a man, will necessarily become his shame and reproach. No vice is the better for being found in the company of intemperance, but becomes more odious in the sight of God and man. And yet how often does vice fly to intemperance for refuge! which shows what miserable company sinners are to themselves, when they can be content to expose themselves to the contempt of all about them, merely for the sake of being free from their own censure for a season. Were it in the power of men to find any expedient to reconcile their reason to their vices, they would not submit to the hard terms of parting with their reason, for the sake of being at ease with their vices. But there is no remedy; as long as we have the power of thinking, so long must we think ill of ourselves when we do ill. The only cure for this uneasiness is to live without thought; for we can never enjoy the happiness of a brute, till we have sunk ourselves into the same degree of understanding.

It may be said, I know, that there have been some profligate

sinners who have discovered no uneasiness on the account of their guilt, but have gone through a life of prosperous wickedness with great show of outward peace and tranquillity: I know too, that there have been instances of men who could play with fire, and be very familiar with it, without showing any sense of pain: but neither will the art of one be accepted as an argument against the sense of feeling, nor the obdurateness of the other be admitted as a proof against the natural sense of a rational mind. Great wicked men are often lost in a perpetual succession of business and pleasure, and have no respite for reflexion. The poor idle sinner seeks ease in intemperance: the more prosperous is kept at an unhappy distance from himself by living in a crowd, and having his hours filled up with business, ceremony, or pleasure; and both equally live, with respect to themselves and their own condition, in one continued lethargy. But such instances as these are of no consequence in determining the general case of mankind; especially considering that even these are laying up in store for themselves sad materials for reflexion, whenever the season for reflexion overtakes them; and that, should they ever be deserted by business and pleasures, instead of being objections to the general sense of mankind under the terrors of guilt, they may seem to be the most miserable examples of it. These observations will receive an additional strength by considering,

Secondly, that the expectation of punishment for sin is the result of the reason given unto us. 'The end of those things is death.'

There are no certain principles from which we can infer the nature and sort of punishment designed by God for sinners; and as reason has left us in the dark in this particular, so neither has revelation clearly discovered this secret of Providence. The representations of Scripture on this head are metaphorical; the images are strong and lively, full of horror and dread, and lead us to this certain conclusion, that endless misery will be the lot of the unrighteous; but they do not lead us to a solution of all the inquiries which an inquisitive mind may raise on this occasion. We read of the 'fire that never goes out,' of the 'worm that never dies,' both prepared to prey on the wicked to all eternity: but what this fire is, what this worm is, that shall

for ever torment, and never destroy the wicked, we are nowhere informed. Among the ancient heathens we find variety of opinions, or, to speak more properly, of imaginations, on this subject; and though none of them can make any proof in their own behalf, yet they all prove the common ground on which they stand, the natural expectation of future punishment for iniquity. The atheistical writers of antiquity entertain themselves with exposing the vulgar opinions of their time: and the unbelievers of our time have trodden in their steps, and pleased themselves mightily with dressing up the various and uncertain imaginations of men on this subject. But what is this to the great point? If nature has rightly instructed us in teaching us to expect punishment for our sins, what signifies it how far men have been mistaken in determining the kinds of punishment that are in reserve for sinners? Let the learning of the Egyptians pass for superstition, and the wisdom of the Greeks for folly; yet what has the sense of nature to do with them, which teaches us to expect punishment for sin from the hand that made us? And when once the time comes in which that hand shall exert itself, this we may be sure of, that the sinner will find no farther subject for laughter and diversion. Men think they gain a great point by bringing plausible reasons against the common notions of future punishment: but suppose these notions to be indeed mistakes, yet if it remains certain from the light of reason, as well as of revelation, that God will punish sin, what does the cause gain by this argument? Will you suppose that God intends to punish wickedness, and yet that he has no possible way to do it? Where lies the defect? Is it want of wisdom to contrive proper means for the punishment of sin, or is it want of power to put them in execution? If he wants neither the one nor the other, we have nothing to inquire after in this case, but what his will is; and of that he has given us such evidence, that we can never lose sight of it as long as we continue to be reasonable creatures.

The power of conscience which every man feels in himself, the fear that pursues every sin, that haunts the most secret and most successful offenders, are great evidences of the common expectation of a judgment to come. For why does the sinner fear, whom no man suspects? Why does he sit joyless over the

gains of his iniquity, whilst all around him are congratulating his prosperity, and know nothing of the dark contrivances by which he obtained it? What is that spirit in man, and how instructed, that can bear up against natural evils and infirmities, but sinks under the wounds of conscience, the grief of which no medicine can assuage, the torment of which no courage can endure? But I need not press the argument any farther, the fact is not disputed: it is allowed on all hands, that there is a general expectation of future judgment; but this, we are told, is the effect of weakness and superstition, and of fear where there is no cause of fear. The question then is, whether this common sense of nature is derived from weakness and infirmity of mind, or is indeed the result of right reason.

Now, if the opinion that prevails in the world, that sin shall be punished, is the mere effect of weakness and superstition, the opinion advanced in direct opposition to it must needs be well founded, and capable of being supported by good reasons. Let us hear then what reason can be offered in support of the opposite opinion, that sin shall not be punished. Now, whatever can be said in maintenance of this assertion must resolve itself into one or other of these propositions; either, that sin does not deserve to be punished; or, that God has no means of punishing it.

As to the first, no one has yet been found to be an advocate for wickedness: even those who seem unwilling to admit a state of future rewards and punishments, have never, that I know, made use of this plea, that sin deserves no punishment: on the contrary, the only reason why they think sin will not be punished hereafter, is, because they have no notion of any state after this. Could they be persuaded of this, they would not want to be told what the fate of sinners must be in another world. And it is worth observing, that all who believe another state after death, agree in believing that sin shall be punished in it; and that all who hope to escape punishment for their sins, hope utterly to be destroyed by death, and never to see life again: so that, as to the merit of sin, there is but one opinion among men, that it deserves to be punished, though some persuade themselves there is no place in which it can be punished.

It being supposed then, that this proposition, sin deserves to be punished, is a maxim agreed to by the common reason of mankind; it is evidently a reason leading to this conclusion, that sin shall be punished. For what reason can be assigned why that should not be done, which our reason tells us is fit to be done? What should move God to act contrary to that which he himself has shown us to be proper, and becoming his wisdom and justice, by the light of that reason with which he has endowed us? What can be said to justify him in informing our judgments that sin ought to be punished, if he has determined in his own mind never to punish it? It must be great want of power or justice in God not to punish iniquity, after he has so strongly declared to every man's understanding the fitness of doing it.

Let us then consider the latter proposition, and see whether God has any means of punishing sin. And it is on this proposition that all the hopes of impunity are built: not that all who hope for impunity are so absurd as to suppose that God wants power to punish the wicked if he thinks fit to do it: but they do suppose that, by his purpose in the creation of man, man has no relation to any state of being but in this life only; that when he dies, all his hopes and fears die with him; and that he is no farther capable of any sense, either of pleasure or of pain.

But by what principles of reason are men led into this supposition? That God might have provided another state after this, and ordained men to live in it either happily or miserably according to their deserts, no one can doubt, who does not doubt of the being of a God. If he has ordered it otherwise, it was because it seemed best to his wisdom: but how could it seem best to his wisdom to leave no means for making a distinction between virtue and vice, by a suitable distribution of rewards and punishments, and yet to teach us, by that reason which he has given us, that it is highly suitable to his wisdom and justice to make such distinction? That he does not make the distinction in this world, is evident to eye-sight: we see the wicked flourish and prosper, and the righteous struggling with sorrows and afflictions; of one sort many live to a good old age, and no harm happeneth unto them; of the other sort many

die in the flower of their youth, and go down to the grave in sorrow: and if after this scene nothing remains, then is there no justice with the Most High; the wicked have the advantage, and the righteous has just cause of complaining that 'he cleansed his heart in vain, and washed his hands in innocence.' But can this be agreeable to his wisdom, who himself has taught us to think it disagreeable to all the rules of wisdom and justice? Is it possible to suppose that a God of truth and justice should teach us those lessons of justice which he never intended to fulfil? that he should train us up in the expectation of rewards and punishments, and purpose never to dispense them? If this be, as it is, very absurd, the consequence must be, that he 'has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, and give to every man according to his works.' You see then that the common sense and expectation of mankind, with respect to the rewards and punishments of another life, is so far from being the effect of weakness and superstition, that it is the immediate result of that reason which God has given us: so strong a result is it from our reason, that it is not possible to justify God and the methods of his providence by the reason which he has given us, without maintaining the certainty of a future state, in which sin shall be punished and righteousness rewarded.

Those of a contrary opinion may have perhaps some notion of an overruling fate and necessity, to which all things are subject; or if they go farther, and conceive that there is a rational Being at the head of nature, who is Author and Governor of all things, yet can they hardly allow him any thing but will, and power, and understanding; for moral attributes can never be discovered in the Deity by those who leave no room for the exercise of them, or rather who introduce a sort of government into the world inconsistent with all moral attributes and perfections. We are most certainly, if we can judge any thing from our own feeling and consciousness, accountable creatures; all our notions of right and wrong, of justice and equity, all our thoughts, reflexions, and forebodings of mind, conspire to fix the expectation on us, that one day we must give account of ourselves and our doings. Our natural notions of God point out to us our Judge; on our own part we find reason and freedom,

which makes us fit subjects of judgment; on the part of God we find wisdom, and mercy, and justice, and every other perfection that may adorn the Judge of the universe: and if after all we are not to be judged, there must be something very wrong in these notions of mankind. We cannot be mistaken in those relating to ourselves, those we feel to be true: the mistake then must be charged on our notions of the Deity, and we must cease to think him a moral agent, at whose hands no justice is to be expected: we must cease to think him good, who has tormented us in vain with the fears of futurity, and deluded us with false hopes of a better life; but has not himself so much regard to virtue or vice as to answer either our hopes or our fears. Judge now whether the expectations of futurity are the dreams of superstition, or the necessary result of thought and reason. But we have one step more to take, and to show,

Thirdly, that these common notions are the foundation of all religion, and therefore must be supposed and admitted in revealed religion, and cannot be contradicted by it.

Some there have been who, finding no hopes for impunity to sinners under the light of reason and nature, have taken shelter in revelation; not desiring to correct and reform their vices, but to enjoy them, and yet to hide them from the wrath to come. These are great extollers of the mercy and goodness of God displayed in the gospel, great assertors of the extensive and unbounded merits of the blood of Christ; so far as to think it a reproach to their Saviour for any one to teach that the hopes of Christians may be destroyed for sin, since Christ has died to make an atonement for it. Such as these are much pleased with the thought that they do great honor to God, by opening to the world the inexhaustible treasures of his mercy, the attribute in which he delights; and think they have some merit and service to plead on account of such pious labor. They imagine they pay great regard to our Redeemer, and are the only true believers in the efficacy of his death; the virtue of which was so great as to draw out the sting of sin, and leave all the pleasures of it behind to be enjoyed by the world.

But would these men consider, they would find that they are offering up to God the sacrifice of fools, whilst they divest him of wisdom and justice, and all other moral attributes, in com-

pliment to his mercy; and represent him to the world as a good-natured, indolent, inactive Being, unconcerned at what passes among his creatures, and prepared to receive to equal degrees of favor the righteous and the sinner. The image of such a Being as this carries with it no terror like to that which arises from the character of a tyrant and oppressor, and therefore does not equally shock the minds of men: but if we examine to the bottom, such a Being is as void of morality as a tyrant. For morality consists in a just distinction of good and evil, and in treating both according to the rules of equity: but he who is equally good to the righteous and the unrighteous, makes as little distinction between them as he who is equally severe to both. One is a good-natured immoral Being, the other a cruel one, but both equally void of justice and morality. This is the honor done to God by ascribing to him a blind mercy, that knows no distinction between the good and the evil. And like to it is the honor done to our blessed Redeemer by the forementioned doctrines, which do in truth make the Son of God to be the minister of sin, and establish the kingdom of darkness on the merits of the death of Christ.

It is beside my present purpose to show how inconsistent these notions are with the true doctrine of the gospel; and yet I cannot satisfy myself without observing that all the precepts, all the representations of Scripture, all the hopes and fears proposed to Christians, teach us another lesson, and confirm to us this great article of all religion, 'That God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.'

This is the gospel doctrine; nor can a true revelation possibly teach otherwise, for God cannot contradict himself, nor gainsay by his prophets that common light of reason which he has planted in men to be their guide and director. Natural religion is the foundation and support of revelation, which may supply the defects of nature, but can never overthrow the established principles of it; which may cast new light on the dictates of reason, but can never contradict them. I cannot listen to revelation but in consequence of the natural notion I have of God, of his being, his wisdom, power, and goodness: destroy then the principles of reason, and there is no room left for revelation. I see and feel the difference between good and evil,

virtue and vice: what spirit must that be which teaches me that there is no such difference? Shall I believe it to be a spirit come from God, when I know that the spirit he has placed within me speaks the contrary? In which case there is only this choice, either to disown God for my creator, or to reject the spirit which contradicts the law of my creation, and the light of reason which God has placed in the minds of men.

From this way of reasoning then it is evident, that if the expectation of rewards and punishments for virtue and vice is the result of reason, and of the common light of nature, it is impossible that it should be superseded by any revelation: for if God has taught the world that sin deserves to be punished, can he be so inconsistent as to teach the contrary? or to assure us, that although it be highly becoming his wisdom and justice to punish sin, yet he means to have no regard to wisdom and justice, but to let sin go unpunished? He might as well teach us that he has no wisdom and justice, and then we should be soon agreed what regard ought to be paid to his revelation.

The conclusion of the whole is, that without holiness no man shall see God; that Christ has, by redeeming us from sin itself, and sanctifying us to be an elect people peculiar to God, redeemed us from the punishment of sin: if we refuse the redemption from sin, we shall never partake in the redemption from the punishment of it. All the arts and contrivances of men to atone for their sins without forsaking them, are affronts to God, contradictions to reason, and such as would effectually overthrow the credit of any revelation which should profess them, but cannot possibly be supported by any; and in fact, are utterly inconsistent with the doctrine of the gospel.

Let us remember then, that 'he only is righteous who doth righteously;' that those only shall be truly happy who shall do the works of God; whilst the hopes and confidence of those who lay great claim to the merits of Christ, but seek not after the righteousness of Christ, shall in the end be vain and delusive: for the word of the Lord shall stand, and be confirmed at the great day: 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXXIII.

PROVERBS, CHAP. XIX.—VERSE 27.

By *the words of knowlege* we are to understand the principles and dictates of virtue and religion: this being admitted, the advice in the text amounts to this; that we should guard against the arts of such as set up for teachers of infidelity and irreligion. These teachers are spoken of, not as men of excessive profligacy and guilt, but as instructors and reasoners against *the words of knowlege*. Two things on this subject recommended to our consideration: I. the several temptations which men lie under to listen to such instructors: II. the great danger there is in listening to them. First: it is one step towards security to see the dangers we are exposed to, that we may double our diligence against surprise. It will be of service to us therefore to know the weaknesses of our own minds, and understand the prejudices and passions which conspire to give us up to those who wish our ruin. Infidelity has no rewards or punishments to bestow: it affords at best but a very hopeless and comfortless prospect, and the passion which some men have to maintain and propagate it is surprising: wicked men indeed are under some temptation to wish well to its cause, because it sets them free from the dread of futurity and the rebukes of conscience: since then the fears and apprehensions of guilt are the strong motives to infidelity, the innocency of the heart is absolutely necessary to preserve the freedom of the mind: which, if duly weighed, is a good reason why a man, as long as he finds himself swayed by appetite and the pleasures of vice, should suspect his own judgment.

We should also consider that, in the unhappy circumstances of sin and guilt, religion opens to us a much safer and more certain retreat than infidelity can afford, and will far more effectually extinguish our fears and restore our tranquillity; for after all our pains taken to subdue the belief of an overruling power and a future state of retribution, we cannot be secure of enjoying long the comforts arising from infidelity in this life; for we may not always have strength enough, in the loss of health or fortune, to subdue natural sense and reason: this topic enlarged on. Since then the hopes which sinners entertain from unbelief even in this world are so very uncertain, and since they cannot alter their condition, except for the worse, in the life to come, it must needs be allowed that they make a bad choice when they sacrifice the powers of the mind to the passions of the heart.

But vice is not the only root from which infidelity springs: it sometimes happens that, whilst we act with a superiority to the vanities of the world and the allurements of pleasure, reason is betrayed by the vanity of our hearts, and sinks under the pride and affectation of knowlege. He who would appear to know more than other men, is ready to contradict the sense and reason of all men; as he who is desirous of being thought more courageous than others, is ready to fight with every one he meets: and to this temptation many sacrifice the innocence of their minds, whilst they wish to recommend themselves to the world as persons of more than ordinary discernment.

He who sits down to examine truth and search after real knowlege, will equally sift all his opinions; will reject none that he has been long possessed of without good reason; will admit no new ones without sufficient authority and weight of argument. But when men aim at being thought more knowing than others, and labor only to spread an opinion of their own sagacity, they can have no satisfaction in discovering the truth and reasonableness of any opinion that is commonly received in

the world: for how will they appear wiser than other men by professing to believe what others believe as well as they? This point enlarged on: other sciences are the attainments of only a small part of mankind; and to triumph over their errors is at best but a limited glory; whereas, religion being the general persuasion of the world, to conquer in this cause looks like universal monarchy, &c.: and thus weak and vain men often make profession of greater infidelity than in truth they are guilty of. Let this case be considered well, in the instances which we meet with; and let the folly of others teach us wisdom.

Another temptation is a kind of false shame, which often, in young people especially, prevails over the fear of God and the sense of religion. When they find what honor is often paid to unbelievers, while religion is scoffed at as ignorance and superstition, they grow ashamed of their profession, and by degrees are hardened so far as to deny their God; and encouraged by example and precept, to brave his vengeance.

These are the most common temptations that betray men to *those instructors which cause to err from the words of knowlege.* How it concerns us to guard against them, will appear when we consider, secondly, the danger there is in listening to them.

And here those only are addressed who have not yet made shipwreck of their reason and conscience; for though the hardened unbelievers are in greatest danger, yet they are farthest removed from the power of conviction. It is unpardonable folly and perverseness for men to forsake religion out of vanity, as if irreligion were a mark of honor and distinction. To fear where there is just cause of fear, where our souls and eternal happiness are at stake, is not below the dignity of a man. To outbrave God and his justice is a sad instance of courage. We must answer for the vanity of our reasoning as well as for the vanity of our pleasures: if we take pains to invent reasoning to oppose the plain evidences which God has given us of his being and power, we shall not go unpunished: if we debase

reason, which was given us for a guide, and force it to submit to our unruly appetites, much more shall we be liable to the vengeance of Heaven.

How far men of irreligious lives and principles are chargeable with these abuses they can best inform themselves: and surely the hopes of immortality and fears of hell should drive them to ask the question. If there really be a future state of retribution, both the punishments and the rewards must be very inconsiderable indeed not to make it worth a man's while to live up to the conditions of being happy. Allowing the punishment less than it really will be, still it must in all cases exceed the advantage gained by transgressing the law; or else there would be encouragement for men to offend: therefore we may be sure that God, who is the wisest of lawgivers, has taken such care to guard his laws and statutes, that there shall be no encouragement to offenders: so that all sinners must be guilty of folly in choosing the sin with the punishment, when this must of necessity exceed the advantage of sinning.

These are the easiest terms that sinners can flatter themselves with; and yet, even on this view, the pleasures of sin will prove a dear bargain. But should the punishments of another life be what we have reason to fear they will be, words cannot express the folly of sin. Short are our days in this world; and should religion prove a deceit, we know the worst of it: it is an error for which we cannot suffer after death; nor will the infidels be able to reproach us with our mistake: but should our hopes and their fears prove true, what miserable torments must they then undergo! this subject enlarged on. Let us consider therefore, when we judge of religion, that something more depends on our choice than the credit of our judgment and the opinion of the world. Let us trust ourselves with ourselves, and retreat from the influence of dissolute companions, and take the advice of the Psalmist, *stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart, and in your chamber, and be still.*

DISCOURSE XXXIII.

PROVERBS, CHAP. XIX.—VERSE 27.

Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowlege.

THAT by the 'words of knowlege' in the text we are to understand the principles and dictates of virtue and religion, is so well known to all who are in the least acquainted with the language of Scripture, especially of the book of Psalms, the Proverbs, and other writings of the like kind, that there is no need to insist on the proof of it. This being admitted, the wise man's advice in the text amounts to this: that we should be careful to guard against the arts and insinuations of such as set up for teachers of infidelity and irreligion.

These teachers are not here considered under the character of vicious and profligate men, given up to the excesses of lewdness, or to be distinguished by any marks of desperate or notorious wickedness: they are spoken of only as instructors, as disputers, and as reasoners against 'the words of knowlege.' Such the wise King forwarns us of, advising us to keep at a distance from danger, and to stop our ears against their pernicious enchantments. He had often before spoken of the danger of associating with wicked men, 'who sleep not, except they do mischief; who eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence:' but here he points out to us another sort; men who have arrived to a pitch of being gravely and seriously irreligious; who spend their coolest hours and their calmest thoughts in the service of infidelity, and are maliciously diligent to pervert men from the acknowlegement of the truth, and by the very arms of heaven, reason and understanding, to enlarge the bounds of the kingdom of darkness.

There are two things which, in speaking to this subject, I would beg leave to recommend to your serious consideration:

First, the several temptations which men lie under to listen to such instructors as the text refers to.

Secondly, the great danger there is in listening to them.

It is one step towards security to see the dangers we are exposed to; for when we know the weak places which are least able to support themselves against the enemy's strength, we shall double our diligence to guard against any surprise from those parts. It will be of great service to us therefore to know the weaknesses of our own minds, to understand the prejudices and passions which conspire together to deliver us up as a prey to those who lie in wait for our ruin. This, if any thing, will enable us to rescue ourselves, by arming us with resolution to withstand the temptations which we are acquainted with before hand. Infidelity has no rewards or punishments to bestow: it affords at best but a very hopeless and comfortless prospect; which would make a considering man wonder whence the temptations to it should arise, and what should give that keenness which appears in the passion with which some men maintain and propagate it. Wicked and profligate men indeed are under some temptation from self-interest to wish well to the cause of infidelity, in opposition to both natural and revealed religion; because it sets them free from the fears of futurity, and delivers them from the many uneasy thoughts that attend them in all their vicious pleasures and enjoyments. To live at once under the dominion of our passions, and the rebuke of our minds, to be perpetually doing what we are perpetually condemning, is of all others the most wretched condition: and it is no wonder that any man should strive to be delivered from it, or that those who resolve to enjoy the pleasure of sin here, should wish to be delivered from the fear of punishment hereafter. This then is a very great temptation to men to hope that all their fears are false and ill-grounded; and that religion, from whence they flow, is nothing but the cunning of wise men and the simplicity of weak ones. Since therefore the fears and apprehensions of guilt are such strong motives to infidelity, the innocence of the heart is absolutely necessary to preserve the freedom of the mind: which, if

duly weighed, is a good reason why a man, as long as he finds himself swayed by appetite and the pleasures of vice, should suspect his own judgment in a matter where his reason is so absolutely chained down by passion and interest, and disabled from exerting itself to do its proper work and office.

Consider too: in the most unhappy circumstances of sin and guilt, religion opens to us a much safer and more certain retreat than infidelity can possibly afford, and will more effectually extinguish the fears and torments we labor under, and restore the long-forgotten peace and tranquillity of the mind: for after all the pains we can take with ourselves to close up our minds, and to shut out the belief of a superior overruling power, and of a future state of rewards and punishments, we cannot be secure of enjoying long even the comfort we propose to ourselves from it in this life. We may not always have strength enough to subdue natural sense and reason. Any sudden shock, either in our health or in our fortune, will disperse our animal spirits, and all the gay imaginations which attend them, and give us up once again to the cruel torments of cool thought and reflexion. Then will our fears rally their forces, and return on us with double strength: hell and damnation will constantly play before our eyes, and not suffer the least glimpse of comfort to enter, nor leave us courage to repent of our sins, or to fly to our last and only hope, the mercy of God. To the truth of what I say, witness the latest and the bitterest hours of dying sinners! Hours of woe and despair! in which the soul, conscious of its own deserts, anticipates the pains of hell, and suffers the very torments of the damned! in which it feels the worm which never dies beginning to gnaw, and lies expiring amidst the terrors of guilt, without power either to think of God or to forget him! So that all that sinners get by forming to themselves resolutions of unbelief (for that I take to be the true case of such unbelievers as we are now speaking of), is to render their case more desperate; to cut off all retreat to the mercy of God, when the day of their distress overtakes them; and to lay up in store for themselves a double portion of misery, both in this life and that which is to come.

Since then even the hopes which sinners conceive from un-

belief in this world, that they shall undisturbedly enjoy the pleasures of vice without suffering under the rebukes of their own minds, are so very uncertain, so liable to be dissipated by every cross accident of life; since they cannot alter their condition, except for the worse, in the life to come; it must needs be allowed that sinners make a very ill choice for themselves, when they sacrifice the powers of the mind to the passions of the heart. As long as men retain a sense of God and religion on their own minds, there is great hope that some time or other reason will prevail, and extricate the man from the misery of sin. Good principles are the seeds of good actions; and though the seed may be buried under much rubbish, yet as long as there is life in it, there is a reasonable expectation of seeing fruit from it some time or other; but when reason and understanding are depraved, and as far corrupted as the very passions of the heart; when thus 'the blind leads the blind,' what else can we expect, but that 'both fall into the ditch?'

But vice is not the only root from which infidelity springs; nor are all who profess themselves unbelievers, to be charged with uncommon degrees of wickedness. Happy were it for mankind, were there but one temptation to one vice! Common diligence might then secure the single pass against the enemy; whereas now, whilst we guard the most suspected place, the strongest often falls into his hands; and thus it sometimes happens in the case before us, that whilst we act with a superiority to all the vanities of the world, to all the allurements and temptations of bodily pleasure, reason itself is betrayed by the vanity of our hearts, and sinks under the pride and affectation of knowlege. To know all that can be attained to by our utmost diligence and sagacity, to search into the hidden causes of things, to examine the truth and reality of our knowlege, is an ambition worthy of a rational soul. But all kinds of laudable ambition grow to be vicious and despicable, when, instead of pursuing the real good, which is the true object, they seek only to make a show and an appearance of it. Thus it is that ambition for virtue produces hypocrisy; ambition for courage, empty boastings and unreasonable resentments; and by the same rule, ambition for learning and knowlege produces pedantry and paradoxes: for he who would desire to appear to

know more than other men, is ready to contradict the sense and reason of all men; for the same cause that he who is desirous to be thought to have more courage than others is ready to quarrel with every man he meets. And this is a temptation to which many daily sacrifice the innocence and integrity of their minds, whilst they mean little else by the singularity of their opinions, than to recommend themselves to the world as persons of more than ordinary discernment. That this is no unfair account of the conduct of some unbelievers, will appear by observing the very different, but equally natural, workings of the mind in these two different states of it; whilst it seeks real knowlege and truth, and whilst it aims only at the credit and reputation of wisdom: and this will help us likewise in examining ourselves, and in judging whether we act with those impartial views and regards to truth that all rational men ought to do.

He who sits down to examine truth and search after real knowlege, will equally sift all his opinions; will reject none that he has been long possessed of without good reason; will admit no new ones without sufficient authority and weight of argument to support them. Wherever he discovers truth, he gains the satisfaction he aimed at: his mind acquiesces in it; nor is he disappointed in the event of his labor and study, when he finds himself at last in the same opinion with the rest of the world; with this only difference, that his persuasion is the effect of reason, theirs perhaps of prejudice and custom; which is a difference that affords much inward satisfaction and peace of mind, but little or no outward glory, or credit of wisdom and understanding.

In the other case, when men aim at being thought wiser and more knowing than others, and labor only to possess the world with an opinion of their sagacity, they can have no satisfaction in discovering the truth and reasonableness of any opinion that is commonly received in the world: for how will they appear wiser than other men by professing to believe what other men believe as well as they? They can no otherwise satisfy their ambition, than by differing from the common sense and reason of mankind; and the whole bent of their mind is to support such their difference with plausible reason and argument. This

indeed carries with it a great appearance of wisdom; for to show all the world to be in error is not the work of every day or of every man. And how can you expect that such vain creatures should so far lose sight of the end they propose, as to give their consent to any well received truth, when the very passion which has possession of their soul makes it necessary for them to treat all such truths with disdain and contempt? Why would you have them so absurd as to examine the reasonableness of any known opinion, when to find it reasonable would be the ruin and destruction of all their glory, and set them only on a level with the rest of mankind? Give them any thing that looks like a new discovery, and they will struggle hard with their reason but they will find something to say in defence of it: but threadbare truth they hate to be seen in; it is a dress their vanity cannot submit to. This sort of vanity it is which has furnished the world with sceptics in every science, and in religion above all others. Other sciences are the attainments of but a small part of mankind; and to triumph over their errors is at best but a limited glory: whereas, religion being the general persuasion of the world, to conquer in this cause looks like universal monarchy, and seems to be the very empire of wisdom and knowlege, rising out of the ruins of universal ignorance and superstition. And thus it comes to pass, that weak and vain men often make profession of greater infidelity than in truth they are guilty of, and are content to give the lie to their own reason as well as that of all mankind, rather than to lose the credit of differing from the rest of the world.

Consider this case well, and judge of it from your own experience and observation. If the instances which meet you every day do not bear witness to the truth of what I say, believe me not: but if they do, let the folly of others teach you so much wisdom as not to give up your reason and understanding, your hopes here and for ever, to a senseless unprofitable vanity. Try your own heart by this rule; and if ever you have offended against the Majesty of heaven by endeavoring to expose his sacred truths, ask yourself this serious question, Whether you did not betray your religion in compliment to yourself, to gain the credit of being a very discerning man, or

set forth your own ability? If you did, remember, before it is too late, that for all these things your offended God will call you into judgment.

There is one sort of temptation more which I shall mention, and that but briefly: it is a kind of false shame, which often, in young people especially, prevails over the fear of God and the sense of religion. When they find what honor is often done to unbelievers, and how well they are received, whilst religion suffers under the hard names of ignorance and superstition, they grow ashamed of their profession; and if not really, yet affectedly they put on the fashionable air of disregard to every thing that is serious. By degrees they harden, till, from being ashamed to own God, they grow bold enough to deny him, encouraged by example and by precept to brave his utmost vengeance.

These are the most common temptations which betray men into the company and friendship of unbelievers, 'those instructors which cause to err from the words of knowlege.' How much it concerns you to guard against these temptations will appear, in the second place, when we consider the danger there is in listening to these instructors.

And here I can only speak to such as have not yet made shipwreck of reason and conscience: for though the hardened unbelievers are in the greatest danger, yet they are farthest removed from the power of conviction: nor will they perceive what miseries they lay up in store for themselves, till they come to take possession of their sad inheritance: and then they will have but too much time, and too many calls, to reflect on the wretched choice they made. But as for you, who have not yet renounced your God and your Redeemer; you especially, whose easy fortunes or flourishing years expose you to the temptations of crafty sinners; give me leave to expostulate this case with all the seriousness the subject requires: and surely this is a serious matter, and deserves your coolest thoughts and reflexions. It is an unpardonable folly and inexcusable perverseness for men to forsake religion out of vanity and ostentation; as if irreligion were a mark of honor, and a noble distinction from the rest of mankind. To fear, where there is true cause of fear, where our souls and our

eternal happiness are at stake, is not below the dignity of a man. To outbrave God and his justice is a sad instance of courage: and men, who sin through such ridiculous vanity, may value themselves for their bravery in despising the fears, and their wisdom in deriding the weakness of religion, and exposing the faith and credulity of men; but perhaps a little time, a very little time, may show them what learned pains they take to dispute themselves into hell. We must answer for the vanity of our reasoning as well as for the vanity of our actions: and if we take pains to invent vain reasoning to oppose to the plain evidences that God has afforded us of his being and power, and to undermine the proofs and authorities on which religion stands, we may be sure we shall not go unpunished for so notable an abuse of so rich a talent intrusted with us by God: much more if we debase reason, which was given us to be the governing principle of our lives, and force it to submit and follow our unruly passions and affections, much more shall we be liable to the vengeance of Heaven.

How far men of irreligious lives and principles are chargeable with these abuses they can best inform themselves: and surely the hopes of immortality, and fears of hell, should compose them to so much seriousnesss as to ask themselves that question. But after all, if on a view of the whole matter, and of the evidences that reason and revelation afford us of a future state, they will not submit to the doctrines and precepts of religion, they must be left to the event for a fuller demonstration of their folly. If there be really a future state of rewards and punishments, both the punishments and the rewards must be very inconsiderable indeed not to make it worth a man's while to live up to the conditions of being happy. So that, when the dispute is concerning the folly of irreligion, we may remit a great deal of the truth in allowing the punishment to be less than really it is, and the argument will still have force enough to convince irreligion of folly. The punishment in all cases must exceed the advantage the offender will reap by transgressing the law; or else as much as the gain to be reaped by breaking the law exceeds the punishment annexed to the breach, so much encouragement there will be for men to offend. Therefore we may be sure that God, who is the wisest of law-

givers, has taken such care to guard his laws and statutes, that there shall be no encouragement for offenders. On which account we may assure ourselves, that let the pleasures and advantages of sin and irreligion be ever so numerous or great, the punishment shall still be greater: so that men shall say, when they are to pay the price of their sins they have sinned exceeding foolishly. Wicked men spend their time to no purpose in disputing against the punishments of sin, which are revealed to us; I mean against the nature of them: for if they once allow that sin and wickedness shall be punished, their own reason will inform them that the punishment must at least be so great, as to make it worth a man's while to abstain from sin. So that all sinners must be guilty of folly in choosing the sin with the punishment, when the punishment must of necessity exceed the advantage of sinning.

These are the easiest terms that sinners can flatter themselves with; and yet, even on this view, the pleasures of sin will prove a dear bargain. But should the punishments of another life be what we have but too much reason to fear they will be, what words can then express the folly of sin? Short are your days in this world, and soon they shall expire: and should religion at last prove a mere deceit, we know the worst of it; it is an error for which we cannot suffer after death; nor will the infidels there have the pleasure to reproach us with our mistake; they and we, in equal rest, shall sleep the sleep of death. But should our hopes and their fears prove true; should they be so unhappy as not to die for ever; which miserable hope is the only comfort that infidelity affords; what pains and torments must they then undergo! Could I represent to you the different states of good and bad men; could I give you the prospect which the blessed martyr St. Stephen had, and show you the blessed Jesus at the right hand of God, surrounded with angels, and 'the spirits of just men made perfect:' could I open your ears to hear the never-ceasing hymns of praise which the blessed above 'sing to him that was, and is, and is to come; to the Lamb that was slain, but liveth for ever:' could I lead you through the unbounded regions of eternal day, and show you the mutual and ever-blooming joys of saints who are at rest from their labor, and live for ever in

the presence of God! or could I change the scene, and unbar the iron gates of hell, and carry you, through solid darkness, to 'the fire that never goes out,' and to 'the worm that never dies:' could I show you the apostate angels fast bound in eternal chains, or the souls of wicked men overwhelmed with torment and despair: could I open your ears to hear the deep itself groan with the continual cries of misery; cries which can never reach the throne of mercy, but return in sad echoes, and add even to the very horrors of hell!—could I thus set before you the different ends of religion and infidelity, you would want no other proof to convince you that nothing can recompense the hazard men run of being for ever miserable through unbelief. But though neither the tongues of men nor of angels can express the joys of heaven, or describe the pains of hell; yet if there be any truth in religion, these things are certain and near at hand.

Consider therefore with yourselves, that when you judge of religion, something more depends on your choice than the credit of your judgment, or the opinion of the world. For God's sake! think religion at least so serious a thing as to deserve your coolest thoughts, and not fit to be determined in your hours of gaiety and leisure, or in the accidental conversation of public places. Trust yourself with yourself; retreat from the influence of dissolute companions; and take the advice of the holy Psalmist: 'stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your own heart, and in your chamber, and be still.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXXIV.

LUKE, CHAP. XVI.—VERSE 31.

It is shown that in matters of reason, as well as in objects of sense, we may at first be deceived by the fair appearance of things which on examination prove worthless. This seems to be the case of the argument in which the text is concerned. Who would not think that the coming of one from the dead would effectually convince an unbeliever? Yet we are told by our Saviour it would have no effect: he who is not convinced by the evidence which God has already given of a future judgment, *would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.* Our Saviour does not mean to deny that the coming of one from the dead is an evidence of a future state; but that they who would not submit to the authority of a divine revelation, would not submit to this. The reason of this judgment is considered: I. if the evidence of revelation be in itself greater and more convincing than the evidence given by one from the dead could possibly be, then there is no reason to expect that he who rejects the greater should submit to the less authority: II. if the unbeliever's objections to the authority of revelation be stronger against the authority of one coming from the dead, he cannot pass over that in one case which he stumbles at in the other: III. if unbelief arises from the corruption of a mind which hates to be reformed, and rejects the evidence because it will not admit the doctrine, not the doctrine because it cannot admit the evidence; in this case all proofs will be alike; and it is on this that our Saviour chiefly grounds his judgment. In the first place, as the au-

thority of a dead man is no more than that of a traveller who relates things of countries through which he has passed, how are we sure that he will not deceive us? are we even sure that it is impossible for any being of the other world to personate a dead man whom we formerly knew? To prove that there is another world, and beings belonging to it, is not proving a future state, that is, a world in which dead men shall live. Christ's resurrection was not merely the apparition of a dead man: he foretold the time and circumstances of it, and put the proof of his mission and doctrine on its performance. His resurrection therefore became a proof that the doctrine he taught was the doctrine of him who had power to raise the dead; so that the authority of our Saviour's word after his resurrection, being the authority of him who has power to raise the dead, must be greater than that of any man dead or living; and proves a commission from the highest power to teach the world; which cannot be proved merely by the appearance of one from the dead. To the question why Lazarus and the rest did not publish their knowlege of the other world, it may be answered, they were merely passive in their resurrection, and brought no more authority from the grave than they carried to it, and therefore had no right to set up for teachers: in proof of Christ's resurection, there was warning given to expect it; and the duration and frequency of his appearance after he had risen, enabled those who saw him to become familiar with it, and qualified them to judge rightly of what they heard and saw; and as this appearance was in consequence of his own prediction, we cannot doubt that it was a true and proper resurrection of his body; it being easier to imagine that he should rise to fulfil his prediction, than that, being really dead, he should contrive and execute any thing that should seem to fulfil it. To satisfy those who affirm that they cannot depend on the credit of others in a case of this nature, it is considered, whether he who believes on the credit of a private apparition to himself,

believes on a surer evidence than he who receives the gospel account on that evidence on which it at present stands: it is shown that the very surprise and fright that would be caused by our seeing one come from the dead, would be a great reason for us to suspect afterwards the report which our senses made of what they had seen—thus it was with those who saw our Lord on his first appearance; nor could any thing but his staying so long with them have cured this, and qualified them to judge for themselves, or report to others with authority what they saw: we may therefore judge whether it is safer to believe the concurring testimony of many persons in their right senses so well qualified to judge, or rely on ourselves when we were hardly masters of our senses. The question, however, is not whether we can be convinced of the fact of such an appearance, but whether we should in that case have a better foundation for faith and religion than the present revelation affords? This is answered by our Saviour in the text, and will appear by considering, secondly, that the objections of unbelievers to the authority of revelation will lie stronger against the authority of one coming from the dead. Whatever has been said against the authority of the gospel revelation, will be applicable also to this kind of it: consequently those who on the foot of natural religion object to the doctrine of the gospel, must much more object to the authority of one coming from the dead. With the atheist, who stands out against the evidence of all nature, no inferior evidence can weigh; he would as easily account for one dead man's recovering life and motion, as he does for the life and motion of so many men whom he daily sees. But what can an unprejudiced person make of this evidence, allowing the dead man's appearance to be real, and his design honest? Should he tell us that the Christian faith is true, we should have less reason to believe him than we have to believe Christ and his Apostles; and should an unbeliever receive the gospel on such evidence, on what would he rest his

faith? The mission of Christ is proved by the completion of prophecies, by the signs and wonders which he wrought by the hand of God, and by his resurrection. We can appeal to the known history of the founders of our religion, in proof of their freedom from worldly cunning and policy. But how can we support the suspected credit of one from the dead? Unless we can prove that there are no evil spirits, or no evil men dead, we cannot clear him from suspicion. Thus, if we cannot digest the evidence of the gospel, in vain do we call for help from the other world. The truth of our Saviour's words will farther appear by considering, thirdly, the temper of infidelity: where unbelief arises from a corrupt mind, which rejects the evidence from hatred of the doctrine, all proofs will be alike; and this is the case our Lord seems to have had in view: for the request to Abraham was made in behalf of men who lived wantonly and luxuriously. Abraham answers, that they had already sufficient evidence of these things if they would make use of it; and the rich man still insists, *but if one went to them from the dead, they will repent:* then follows the text, which is the last resolution of this case. We have reason to suspect that no new lights or evidences would be effectual in reclaiming hardened sinners: they might be terrified for a time; but when the infidel had conquered his own fears, he would conclude that all religion is made up of that fear which he felt himself, and which others cannot so manfully get rid of: that it is in the nature of man to withstand such evidences, may be learned from the example of Pharaoh, and of the guards who were eye-witnesses of our Lord's resurrection. It is shown that belief does not imply obedience, as all sinners are not infidels; and why should obedience be the consequence of belief in one case more than another? The strongest arguments for obedience are afforded by the gospel; therefore he who believes and yet disobeys it, will not be reformed by any other evidence: so that our Saviour's judgment is just with regard to all infidels

and sinners. God having once sent his own Son from the dead to admonish us, has already given a sufficient evidence of all things which we are concerned to know; and all other intercourse with the other world would be useless.

DISCOURSE XXXIV.

LUKE, CHAP. XVI.—VERSE 31.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

It sometimes happens in matters of reason, as it often does in objects of sense; that which at first appearance makes a fair show, on examination proves to be worthless and of no esteem. Some fruits which allure the eye most, can the least bear the test of the palate: they may be admired by the traveller who rides hastily by and only sees them at a distance; but when they are served up at the table, the taste soon rectifies the mistake of the eyes. So likewise in matters of reason: some arguments strike the fancy immediately, and take the judgment captive, before it has time fairly to examine the merits of the cause; and yet when the vigor of the first onset is over, and time is given for reflexion, the demonstration dwindles into nothing, and leaves a man admiring that he was so easily deceived by so palpable a cheat. And this seems to be the case of the argument in which the text is concerned: who would not think that the coming of one from the dead would effectually convince an unbeliever? Or were we for ourselves to desire the last evidence for a future state, what more should we desire than to see one come from the dead; one of our old acquaintance; and to hear from him the relation of what happened to him after death, and of what he had seen and experienced in the other world? And yet this evidence, our Saviour tells us, would have no effect on an unbeliever: he who can hold out against the evidence that God has already given that he will one day judge the world in righteousness, 'would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.'

Our Saviour does not deny the coming of one from the dead to be an evidence of a future state; nor yet, allowing it to be an evidence, does he determine of what weight and authority it is or ought to be. This only he affirms; that let the authority of it be what it will, they who will not submit to the authority of a divine revelation will not submit to this; the reason of which judgment may appear from the following considerations:

First, if the evidence of revelation be in itself greater and more convincing than the evidence given by one from the dead can possibly be, then there is no reason to expect that he who rejects the greater should submit to the less authority.

Secondly, if the objections which the unbeliever makes use of against the authority of revelation, lie stronger against the authority of one coming from the dead, it is not to be supposed that he will pass over that in one case which he so mightily stumbles at in the other. Or,

Thirdly, if unbelief be the effect of a vitiated and corrupted mind, which hates to be reformed; which rejects the evidence because it will not admit the doctrine, not the doctrine because it cannot admit the evidence; in this case all proofs will be alike, and it will be lost labor to ply such a man with reason or new evidence, since it is not want of reason or evidence that makes him an unbeliever. And it is on this case chiefly that our Saviour grounds his judgment in the text.

First, then, let us consider whether the evidence on which revelation stands be in itself greater or more convincing than the evidence of one coming from the dead can be: if it is, we must subscribe to our Saviour's judgment; that he 'who will not hear Moses and the prophets,' or Christ and his Apostles, 'would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.' Whatever a dead man, who appears to you, may tell you concerning another world, all the reason you can have to believe him is, because you suppose him to come from the other world, and to relate things which he has seen and known: so that his authority is no more than barely the authority of a traveller, who relates things of the countries through which he has passed. And how will it appear to you, that one from the dead cannot possibly deceive you? As he is a man, I am sure you

have reason to mistrust him; and what reason you have to rely on him as a dead man I know not. Possibly you may think that the very seeing of one come from the dead will of itself prove the great point of all, the reality of a future state. But are you sure it is impossible for any being of the other world to personate a dead man, and to appear to you in the shape and figure of one you formerly knew? Surely it is one thing to prove that there is another world and beings belonging to it, and another to prove a future state, that is, a world in which dead men shall live.

Our Saviour's resurrection was something more than merely the apparition of a dead man: he foretold the time and circumstances of his resurrection, and put the proof of his mission and doctrine on the performance of this great wonder; so that by this means his resurrection became a direct proof of this, that the doctrine he taught was the doctrine of him who has power to raise the dead. And since part of his doctrine is, that the dead shall be raised; we are thus far certain that he, who has power to raise the dead, has assured us that the dead shall be raised: for no one can foretel the time and circumstances of a dead man's rising to life, who has not the power, or is not commissioned by him who has the power, of life and death. So that the authority of our Saviour's word after his resurrection was not barely the authority of one coming from the dead, but it was the authority of him who has power to raise the dead; which authority we know belongs not to man, and therefore is greater than the authority of any man either from the dead or the living. So that our Saviour's resurrection proves a commission from the highest power to teach the world; which cannot be proved merely from the appearance of one from the dead. And here lies the true difference between the resurrection of Christ, and the resurrection of those whom our Saviour himself raised from the dead. We have been asked why Lazarus and the rest did not publish their knowlege of the other world? One plain answer is, they were not commissioned so to do: their resurrection was a proof of his power and commission, who raised them to life, but of their own power and commission it was no proof: they were merely passive in their resurrection, and brought no more authority from the grave than they

carried to it; and therefore had no right to set up for teachers.

Then as to the reality of our Saviour's resurrection, there was warning given to expect it; which of itself is a great evidence of sincere dealing. Men do not use to give public notice of the cheats they intend to play; or if ever they have, the success has been answerable to the management, and yielded nothing but shame and confusion to the contrivers. And after his resurrection, his stay on earth was so long, as to give full satisfaction to all concerned, of the truth and reality of what they saw. At his first appearance, the disciples were in the same case with others who think they see spectres and apparitions; that is, they were confounded and amazed, and did not know well what they saw: and had not the frequency of our Saviour's appearances made them familiar to them, so that they bore the sight of him with the same sedateness of mind as they did in his lifetime, and consequently had all the necessary qualifications to judge rightly concerning what they heard or saw; had it not been for this, I say, their evidence in this case would not have been equal to the weight of those truths it is to support. And farther, since this appearance was in consequence of the prediction he made of his own resurrection, there is no room to doubt that it was a true and proper resurrection of his body: for it is much easier to imagine that he should come to life, and fulfil his prediction, than that he should, being really dead, contrive and execute any thing that should seem to fulfil it.

Possibly this may be allowed, and yet not give satisfaction in this matter: for it is not, you will say, that the resurrection of our Saviour is such a work as is not proper to satisfy all doubts, that makes you desire to see one from the dead; but it is that you would willingly be satisfied by your own eyes, and not depend on the credit of another for a thing of this nature: had you been in the place of the Apostles, and seen our Lord come from the grave, that then you would not have desired to have seen any body else; but now you think you might find that conviction in seeing one come from the dead yourself, which you cannot find in the reports of those who pretend to have seen one.

Let us consider this case then; whether he who believes on the credit of a private apparition to himself, believes on a surer

evidence, than he who receives the gospel account on that evidence on which it at present stands. I will not deny but that a man's fancy may be more powerfully wrought on, not only by seeing, but even by supposing that he sees, one from the dead: but this is so far from being an advantage, that in truth it is quite otherwise; for the more work things of this nature find for the imagination, the less room do they leave for the judgment to exercise itself in. Our senses at all times are liable to be imposed on, but never more than when we are in a fright or surprise. In such cases it is common to overlook our friends, and not to know who was with us or who not: and the very surprise that would necessarily attend on seeing one come from the dead, would be a great reason for us to suspect afterwards the report our senses made of what they had seen. And this was indeed the case of those who saw our Saviour on his first appearance: nor could any thing have cured this but his staying with them so long as he did; so that at last they were able to see him without being disturbed, or suffering any alteration in their usual temper: and this qualified them to judge for themselves, and report to others with authority what they saw. So that the circumstances of our Saviour's resurrection were such as admitted a due testimony; whereas it is very much to be doubted, whether he who sees one come from the dead be capable to give himself satisfaction afterwards, either as to what he saw or what he heard. And judge you, whether you would choose to believe the concurring testimony of many persons in their right senses so well qualified to judge, or rely on yourself at a time when you are hardly master of your senses.

But farther; suppose you could converse with a man from the dead with the same temper and calmness that you do with one of your friends or acquaintance; what would be the consequence? You would probably rest assured that you had seen a man from the dead, and perhaps be more satisfied of this than at present you are that the disciples saw Christ after his death. Allowing this, what follows? The question is not, whether he that sees a man come from the dead, may be sure he sees a man come from the dead; but whether he has a better foundation for faith and religion than the present revelation affords? This is what our Saviour affirms; 'If they hear not

Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.' The same reasons that move you to reject the authority of Christ and his Apostles, would move you to reject the authority of your new acquaintance from the dead: which will appear by considering,

Secondly, that the objections which unbelievers urge against the authority of revelation, will lie stronger against the authority of one coming from the dead: for first, as to the nature of this sort of evidence, if it be any evidence at all, it is a revelation; and therefore whatever has been said against the authority of revelation will be applicable to this kind of it: and consequently those who, on the foot of natural religion, stand out against the doctrine of the gospel, would much more stand out against the authority of one coming from the dead. And whether it would weigh more with the Atheist, let any one consider; for no revelation can weigh with him; for the being of God, which he disbelieves, is supported with greater arguments and greater works than any revelation can be: and therefore, standing out against the evidence of all nature, speaking in the wonderful works of the creation, he can never reasonably submit to a less evidence. Let then one from the dead appear to him; and he will, and certainly may, as easily account for one dead man's recovering life and motion, as he does for the life and motion of so many men whom he sees every day. Is it not as hard, do you think, to make a man at first, and breathe into him the breath of life, as it is to make him up again, after he has once been dead? And therefore he that can satisfy himself as to the first, need not be troubled about the last. For I am sure the appearance of a dead man could never teach the Atheist, on his own principles, to reason himself into the belief of a Deity, though possibly it might scare him into it; which is too low a design for the providence of God to be concerned in, and therefore can never be a reason for his giving this sort of evidence to mankind.

But farther; let us suppose a man free from all these prejudices, and then see what we can make of this evidence. If a dead man should come to you, you must suppose either that he speaks from himself, and that his errand to you is the effect of his own private affection for you, or that he comes by com-

mission and authority from God. As to the first case, you have but the word of a man for all you hear: and how will you prove that a dead man is incapable of practising a cheat on you? Or allowing the appearance to be real, and the design honest, do you think every dead man knows the counsels of God, and his will with respect to his creatures here on earth? If you do not think this, and I cannot see possibly how you should think it, what use will you make of this kind of revelation? Should he tell you that the Christian faith is the true faith, the way to heaven and happiness, and that God will reward all true believers; you would have much less reason to believe him, than now you have to believe Christ and his Apostles: and therefore, if you reject Christ and his Apostles, neither can this new evidence prevail with you: for suppose that a man from the dead should presume to teach you a new religion, to instruct you in new rites and ceremonies, to institute new sacrifices and oblations; would you think yourself warranted by a sufficient authority to do and practise as he taught you? Would you not require better evidence of his knowing the will of God, than merely seeing him come from the dead? And yet this is the case: should an unbeliever receive the gospel on such evidence, he receives a new religion; for to an unbeliever it is new, and the whole weight of his faith must rest on the credit and authority of this man from the dead; and it would be as reasonable for an unbeliever to receive a perfectly new doctrine on this authority, as to receive an old one which he before disbelieved. But on the other side, should you suppose this man to come by the particular order and appointment of God, and consequently that what he says is the word and command of God; you must then be prepared to answer such objections, as you are now ready to make against the mission and authority of Christ and his Apostles.

First, then, we ask, how this commission appears? If you say, because he comes from the dead, we cannot rest here; because it is not self-evident that all who come from the dead are inspired: and yet farther than this you cannot go; for it is not supposed that your man from the dead works miracles. The mission of Christ we prove by prophecies, and their completion; by the signs and wonders he wrought by the hand of

God; by his resurrection, which includes both kinds, being in itself a great miracle, and likewise the completion of a prophecy: which circumstance, as was before observed, adds great weight to his authority. Besides, we are often urged to show that the authors of our religion were free from interest and design, and that our faith is not founded in the politics of cunning and artificial men; and we must desire you to do the same good office for the prophet who comes from the dead. As for ourselves, we appeal to the known history of those who were founders of our religion: there you may find them 'persecuted, afflicted, and tormented:' their gain was misery; their recompense, hatred from the world; and their end, in the eyes of men, was destruction. These are the proofs of their worldly cunning and policy, and the results of their deep laid designs. But how will you support the suspected credit of one from the dead? He comes and tells his story, goes off, and there is an end of him: and unless you can prove there are no evil spirits, or no evil men dead, you cannot clear him from the suspicion, nor fathom the depth of his design: he appears to you like the wind, the sound of which you hear; but whence it comes, or whither it goes, you know not. If you will listen to the evidences of the gospel, we will show you in whom we have believed: we will show you men like ourselves, armed with the power of God, with innocence of life, with patience in all manner of affliction, and at last sealing with their blood the truth of their mission. But if you cannot digest this evidence, in vain do you call out for help from the other world; for neither 'would you be persuaded though one rose from the dead.' And this will farther appear,

Thirdly, by considering the temper of infidelity; for where unbelief proceeds, as generally it does, from a vitiated and corrupted mind, which hates to be reformed; which rejects the evidence, because it will not admit the doctrine, not the doctrine, because it cannot admit the evidence; in this case all proofs will be alike, and it will be lost labor to ply such a man with reason or new evidence, since it is not want of reason or evidence that makes him an unbeliever. And this case chiefly our Saviour seems to have in his view; for the request to Abraham to send one from the dead was made in behalf of men

who lived wantonly and luxuriously; who, as the Psalmist expresses it, 'had not God in all their thoughts.' The rich man in torment could think of no better expedient to rescue his brethren from the danger they were in of coming into the same condition with himself, than sending one from the dead to admonish them, and to give them a faithful account how matters stood there, and how it fared with him. To which Abraham answers, that they had already sufficient evidence of these things; that they wanted no means of knowlege, if they would make use of those they had: 'They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.' But still he insists, 'Nay, Father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.' Then follows the text, which is the last resolution of this case, 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.' And indeed where infidelity is the effect of such profligate wickedness, it deserves not so much regard from God, as that he should condescend to make particular applications to it by new lights and evidences: and should he do it, there is reason to suspect it would be ineffectual. We see, in the ordinary course of providence, many judgments inflicted on sinners to reclaim and amend them; but they harden themselves against them; so that their last state is worse than their first. I will not answer for the courage of sinners, how well they would bear the sight of one from the dead; nay, I am apt to imagine it would strangely terrify and amaze them. But to be frightened and to be persuaded are two things: nature would recover the fright, and sin would recover strength, and the great fright might come to be matter of ridicule. How easy would it be, when the fright was over, to compare this event with the many ridiculous stories we have of apparitions, and to come at last to mistrust our own senses, and to conclude that we were misled, like a man in a dark night who follows an *ignis fatuus?* And what is worse, when the infidel had once conquered his own fears, and got loose again from the thoughts of religion, he would then conclude that all religion is made up of that fear which he felt himself, which others cannot get rid of, though he so manfully and happily subdued it. You may think it perhaps impossible that a man should not be con-

vinced by such an appearance: the same I believe you would think of the judgments which befel Pharaoh, that it is hardly possible any man should withstand them; and yet you see he did: nay, did not the guards, who were eye-witnesses of our Saviour's resurrection; who saw the angel that rolled away the stone from the mouth of the sepulchre; who shook and trembled with fear, and became as dead men; did not they, after all this, receive money to deny all they saw, and to give false evidence against the person they beheld coming from the grave? So you see, it is in the nature of man to withstand such evidences, where the power of sin is prevalent.

Besides, there are many sinners who are not infidels: they may believe Moses and the prophets, though they will not hear them, that is, obey them. Now, should one come from the dead to these men, the most they could do would be to believe him: but that does not imply their obeying him; for they believe Moses and the prophets, Christ and his Apostles, an yet obey not them; and why should obedience be the consequence of belief in one case more than another? There can be no greater arguments for obedience than the gospel affords; and therefore he who believes the gospel, and disobeys it, is out of hope to be reformed by any other evidence. So that, considering this case with respect to all manner of infidels or sinners, there is reason in our Saviour's judgment; 'If they will not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.'

And hence, perhaps, we may learn the reason, why this sort of intercourse between the other world and this is so very rare and uncommon, because it could serve no good end and purpose; for God having already given a sufficient evidence of all things which we are concerned to know, there is no room to expect or hope for such kinds of admonition. He sent the greatest person of the other world to us, his own Son, and sent him too from the dead: he has come himself down to us in signs and wonders and mighty works; and why he should send a man from the dead to tell you what is legible in the book of nature, what he, his Son, his Apostles and Prophets have already told you, you that can give the reason, give it.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXXV.

PSALM XIX.—VERSE 12.

SELF examination, the only method of obtaining a distinct knowlege of our sins: hence the frequency of exhortation to undertake it. As in temporal concerns, men whose prodigality has reduced them to extreme poverty and distress, find themselves unable to state their accounts, and come to an exact knowlege of their affairs; so in spiritual matters, those that have been long acquainted with vice and strangers to reflexion, when they begin seriously to repent, know in general that they have a heavy weight of sin on their souls, though the particulars they are able to recollect fall very short of the sense which they have of their condition: thus, not being able to satisfy themselves that their repentance is perfect, they do not always enjoy that peace and tranquillity which they expected as the fruit of it.

The holy Psalmist had this sense of his condition when he expressed himself in the words of the text, and addressed God as his only refuge. The great comfort to be derived from God's wisdom, in setting before us the examples of good men in their lowest and most imperfect state, considered. The words of the text, considered without regard to the person who spoke them, do not admit of such consolatory conclusions, as when they are considered to have been uttered by David, of whose repentance and acceptance we do not doubt; for in this point of view they afford us two propositions: I. that the security and efficacy of repentance do not depend on a particular recollection of all our errors: II. that for such

errors as we cannot recollect, a general confession and repentance will be sufficient.

These two propositions contain the plain doctrine of the text: but that we may not mistake in the application of it to ourselves, and suppose that a wilful ignorance of our sins will ensure forgiveness, it is necessary to examine the nature of what may fairly be called *secret sins*. And—I. we may reckon among them those for which our liturgy has taught us to ask repentance and forgiveness, under the general names of negligences and ignorances; for neglect of our duty, and negligence in discharging it, are two different things, the one arising from aversion to the work, and consent of the mind, the other from want of thought and resolution. The best men often complain that, in the midst of their devotion, some chance object, some favorite care, diverts their attention, and distracts their thoughts: offences of this kind are so frequent in every part of our duty, that it is impossible to bring every single act to our remembrance. Secondly, sins of ignorance are likewise secret sins: *where there is no law*, says the Apostle, *there is no transgression*. But when men venture boldly on actions, conscious that they know not whether they are going right or wrong, their sin is presumption, and not ignorance: repentance for this not to be reckoned with that for our secret sins: for if a man thinks virtue and vice so indifferent, that he may venture to follow them blindfold, this is a proof that his heart is not right with God. But though this ignorance may be presumptuous and incur responsibility, the follies and sins it leads to may be unknown to us; and these, though aggravated by circumstances, can only be lamented under the character of *secret sins*. Thirdly, nothing shows corruption of heart more than confirmed habits of sinning; and yet in this perfection of vice we lose the very sense of sin: instance of this effect of habit in profane swearers: but when such sinners call themselves to judgment, they can only tell

that they have grievously offended: they know not the measure of their iniquity, nor the aggravations of it: the utmost therefore that a penitent in this case can do is to lament the offences of his heart and tongue, and pray that God would blot out the remembrance of them.

Fourthly, the Apostle has advised us *not to be partakers of other men's sins;* which shows that when others sin through our example or encouragement, we share their guilt. How far our influence in this respect extends, is more than we can tell, yet not more than we shall answer for. The higher our station and the greater our authority, the more reason have we to fear being involved in this kind of guilt. Power, honor, and riches contrasted with this (in a digression) as great means of salvation in the hands of a wise man.

Fifthly, the great measure of folly and vanity and self-love in our best actions is what seldom falls under our notice; and yet who is free from such errors? How much of our virtue and religion arises from regard to our own credit and reputation? and when we are most eager in pursuit of some good end, how often are we only gratifying some private passion? To this account may be added the many vain imaginations which are conceived in the heart, though never brought into action: as those of the ambitious man; of the sensualist; and of the revengeful man. Lastly, when we come to repent of our sins, many of them may be secret to us merely through the weakness and imperfection of memory: these, although we may have been heretofore conscious of them, are with respect to our repentance as secret as if we had never known them, and can only be confessed and lamented in general terms. These then are the several kinds of our secret sins: of all which there is one general character, that they are such as we cannot, not such as we will not, remember.

II. In the second place we are to consider what guilt we contract by our secret sins, lest it should be thought that the

sins which escape our knowlege ought not to burden our conscience. Where there is no guilt, there needs no remission; and if we cannot be justly charged with our secret sins, there is no sense in the Psalmist's petition, *cleanse thou me from my secret faults:* in another place also he tells us that God *sets our secret sins in the light of his countenance.* In the instances already given we may observe that our secret sins are sometimes the most heinous: thus it is in the case of habitual sins; we are too well acquainted with them to take notice of them: but shall this plead their excuse? shall only fearful sinners and modest beginners be punished, whilst that iniquity which is become void of shame and sense of sin, escapes judgment? This is not consistent with any rule of equity. The same might be made to appear in other instances: for every *idle word,* how soon soever it slips out of the memory, for every vain imagination, how soon soever it vanishes away, we shall *give an account at the day of judgment:* for the guilt of sin arises not from the power of our memory, and is extinguished not by the weakness of it. If we forget, there is One before whom our iniquities are ever present.

Conclusion: since many of our sins are secret to us, they can only be repented of in general; and since many are very heinous, they must be repented of seriously. By general repentance then we are not to understand a slight or superficial repentance only. The petition of the Psalmist proceeded from a heart deeply affected with the sense of its guilt, and does not express the sentiments of one who was excusing or lessening his faults.

DISCOURSE XXXV.

PSALM XIX.—VERSE 12.

Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.

THE only method of coming to the distinct knowlege of our sins, and to a due sense of them, is self-examination; and therefore it is, that you are so frequently exhorted to enter into yourselves, to converse with your own hearts, and to search out the evil which is in them. But often it happens that this method, after the sincerest and most laborious inquiry, leaves men under great dissatisfaction of mind, and subject to the frequent returns of doubts and misgivings of heart; lest something very bad may have escaped their search, and, for want of being expiated by sorrow and repentance, should remain a debt on their souls at the great day of account. As in temporal concerns, men often know that, by a long course of prodigality and many expensive vanities, they have contracted a great debt on their estates, and have brought themselves to the very brink of poverty and distress, and yet, when they try to think and consider of their condition, find themselves utterly unable to state their accounts, or to set forth the particulars of the debt they labor under; but the more they endeavor to recollect, the more they are convinced that they are mere strangers at home, and ignorant of their own affairs: so in spiritual concerns likewise, men who have been long acquainted with vice, and long strangers to thought and reflexion, when they come to be sensible of the danger of their condition, and to set themselves seriously to repent, know in general that they have a heavy weight of sin and guilt on their souls; but yet the particulars, though many and heinous, which they are able

to recollect and charge themselves with distinctly, fall very short of the sense they have of their condition, and do by no means fill up that which they know to be the measure of their iniquities. And hence it is, that after the most careful examination of themselves, and the most solemn repentance for all their known sins, they do not always enjoy that peace and tranquillity of soul which they expected, and had promised themselves, as the blessed fruits of contrition; but suffer extremely under uncertain hopes and fears, not being able to satisfy themselves that their repentance was perfect, which they know was formed on a knowlege of their sins that was very imperfect.

The holy Psalmist had this sense of his condition, and felt how unable he was sufficiently to acknowlege his own guilt before God, when he broke forth into the complaint with which the text begins, 'Who can understand his errors?' or as it runs in the translation which is more familiar to us, 'Who can tell how oft he offendeth?' In this distress his only refuge was to the mercy of God, confessing, with the greatest humility of heart, that his transgressions were not only more than he could bear, but even more than he could understand: 'Cleanse thou me from my secret faults.' Whenever men entertain doubts of their own sincerity and due performance of religious acts, it is extremely difficult to reason with their fears and scruples, and to dispossess them of the misapprehensions they have of their own state and condition. Such suggestions as bring ease and comfort to their minds come suspected, as proceeding from their own or their friends' partiality; and they are afraid to hope, lest even to hope in their deplorable condition should prove to be presumption, and assuming to themselves more than in reason or justice belongs to them. But when we can show them men of approved virtue and holiness, whose praise is in the book of life, who have struggled with the same fears and waded through even the worst of their apprehensions to the peaceful fruits of righteousness; it helps to quicken both their spirits and their understanding, and at once to administer knowlege and consolation. And for this reason we can never sufficiently admire the wisdom of God in setting before us the examples of good men in their lowest and most imperfect state. Had they

been shown to us only in the brightest part of their character, despair of attaining to their perfection might incline us to give over the pursuit, by throwing a damp on our best resolutions: but when we see them rising to virtue and holiness from the same wretched condition which we are in, and laboring under the same difficulties, the same anxieties and torments of mind; when we see their very souls convulsed with the pangs of repentance, and their faith almost sinking under the doubtfulness of their condition; when we hear them cry to God in the words of anguish, not knowing how to pray, or in what terms to lament their sins; when we see this nakedness of their souls, and find that they are like one of us, what secret comfort must it give to an afflicted spirit, what support to a mind oppressed with the sense of guilt, to find in these great examples what heavenly joy and peace often spring from the lowest depths of sorrow and woe!

And there is indeed, with respect to the comfort and security of a sinner, a great difference between arguments drawn from general reasonings and reflexions, and those which are suggested from the experience and practice of holy men. In the case before us, if we consider the words of the text without regard had to the person who spoke them, we may raise many reflexions from the great variety of human actions, and the complicated nature of them, from the short-sightedness of the understanding and the weakness and imperfection of the faculties, to show how very hard it is, and almost impossible, for any one perfectly to understand his errors: whence might be deduced the reasonableness of the petition, 'Cleanse thou me from secret faults;' because where we cannot in particular recollect, we can only in general lament, our iniquities: beyond this probability we cannot go to determine the method in which God will deal with sinners. But take the words as spoken by David, of the sincerity of whose repentance and the acceptance of it with God we nothing doubt, and the conclusions will be much fuller, and such as cannot fail to refresh the soul of every languishing penitent; for in this view the words fairly afford us these two propositions:

First, that the security and efficacy of repentance do not depend on a particular recollection of all our errors.

Secondly, that for such errors as we cannot recollect, a general confession and repentance are full and sufficient.

These two propositions contain the plain doctrine of the text; so plain, that I need not spend your time in enlarging on it. But that we may not mistake in the application of it to ourselves, and hope for forgiveness whilst we are willingly ignorant of our sins, and to save the trouble and pain of recollection, endeavor to cover them all under general ejaculations and petitions for mercy; I beg your patience whilst I set before you of what kind and nature the sins are which we may justly call our secret sins, and for the expiation of which a general confession and repentance will be accepted.

And, first, we may reckon among our secret sins those which our liturgy has taught us to ask repentance and forgiveness for, under the general names of negligences and ignorances. For neglect of our duty, and negligence in discharging it, are two things; the one arising from a dislike and aversion to the work, and attended with a consciousness and consent of mind; the other proceeding commonly from want of thought or want of disposition, two infirmities which we care not to accuse ourselves of, and yet from which we are seldom free; insomuch that when we think ourselves most secure of a good disposition and firm resolution to go through the business of our duty, they often forsake us in the midst of our work, and we find ourselves on a sudden becalmed, our inclinations grown faint and languid, and too sick of the employment to support us in the prosecution of it.

Such surprises good men have frequently complained of in their devotions: they set out with zeal and fervency of spirit, with eyes and hearts uplifted to God, till some chance object diverts the eyes, some favorite care steals into the heart, and they both wander and are lost in the multiplicity of objects and imaginations which succeed each other; and when their thoughts return to the proper object, they are as one that awaketh from a dream. Offences of this kind are secret to us even whilst they are committing, the mind not being conscious to the delusion; and yet they are so frequent in every part of our duty, that when we call ourselves to the strictest account,

it is impossible to find their number, or to bring every single act to our remembrance.

Secondly, sins of ignorance are secret sins likewise, as the very name they are distinguished by imports. 'Where there is no law,' says the Apostle, 'there is no transgression;' and therefore unavoidable ignorance seems to be rather a misfortune than a crime; and though it be dumb and cannot speak in its own defence, yet its very silence will be a stronger plea in the presence of the Almighty than all the labored excuses which the wit of knowing sinners has invented. In all cases where men may be said to offend through ignorance, they must be equally insensible of the crimes they commit, and the ignorance they labor under; and therefore equally incapable of repenting particularly of their sins and of their ignorance. For when men venture boldly on actions, being conscious to themselves that they know not whether they are going right or wrong, their sin is presumption and not ignorance; and should they chance to blunder into the right way, it is much to be doubted, whether the happiness of their mistake will excuse the rashness of their attempts. Such repentance therefore as this must be numbered, not with our secret faults, but with such sins, as being acted with consciousness and consent, carry in them an avowed contempt of the majesty and authority of God: for if a man thinks virtue and vice so indifferent, that he may venture to choose blindfold which to follow, there wants no better evidence that his heart is not right with God, who can with so much coolness and temper affront his honor.

But though the ignorance itself be presumptuous, and is such as, being conscious to, we must certainly be accountable for; yet the mistakes, the follies, the sins it leads us to, may be unknown to us, both at the time of our offending and of our repenting: and whatever aggravation they receive from the obstinate ignorance they proceed from; how much soever the heinousness of them may deserve to be distinguished in our sorrow and contrition; yet, since the mind cannot reach the knowlege of them, they can only be lamented under the general character of secret sins. Nor is this the only case in which our sins partake of the malice of the will, and yet escape the notice of the understanding: for,

Thirdly, nothing shows more the corruption of the will or disinclination of the heart to virtue, than confirmed customs and habits of sinning; and yet in this perfection of vice we lose the very sense and feeling of sin. Habits grow from often repeated actions; and, though at first they require distinct acts of the will to give them being, yet at last we grow so perfect, so ready at the work as not to want the authority and consent of the mind: as servants, who, by being often told their masters' work, at last fall into the road of their business without being called on, and yet act as much under the direction of their masters' will as when they were under their daily or hourly instruction. And so it is in habits: the mind, which is the governing principle, lies by, and the work goes on without being attended to. Of many instances give me leave only to mention one, which shall be that of common swearers and blasphemers of the holy name: a vice in itself so prodigious, that no aggravation can heighten it, no excuse can lessen it! And yet those who are most guilty of this sin are least sensible of it: it is so familiar to them that they are not conscious when they offend: blaspheming is their idiom, a turn in their way of speaking, and oaths the mere expletives of their language. And when every sober heart trembles to hear what they utter, they only are unconcerned, as only being ignorant of the accursed malice with which they defy the living God. For all these things God will call sinners into judgment; in his book they are noted down: but yet when sinners call themselves to judgment, they only can tell that they have grievously offended: the measure of their iniquity they know not, nor the many aggravations of it: and therefore the utmost that the sincerest penitent can do is to lament the offences of his heart and tongue, which he is not able to remember, and pray to God that he likewise will be pleased to blot out the remembrance of his iniquities.

Fourthly, the Apostle has advised us 'not to be partakers of other men's sins;' which shows, that when others sin, being led to it by our influence, example, or encouragement, we share with them in the guilt of their iniquity. How far our influence spreads, to what instances, and what degrees of vice, how many we seduced by our example, or hardened by our encou-

ragement, is more than we can tell, and yet not more than we shall answer for. Those who are thus entered in our service, and sin under our conduct, are but our factors: they trade for us, as well as for themselves; and whatever their earnings are, we shall receive our due proportion out of the wages of their sin. This is a guilt which steals on us without being perceived; it grows whilst we sleep, and is loading our account even when our bodies are in the possession of the grave. The higher our station, and the greater our authority, the more reason have we to fear being involved in this kind of guilt; because in proportion to our authority will the infection of our example spread; and as our power is great, our encouragement will be the more effectual; and some perhaps there may be, who shall appear not only for their own sins, but for the wickedness of the age they lived in. But then, on the other side, (pardon me a small digression) power, and honor, and riches, are great means of salvation in the hands of a wise man, who knows how to use them to the glory of God, and the good of mankind. To him shall be added the virtue and religion which grow up under his influence and protection: and how transporting will the surprise be to such happy souls, when they shall find the improvement of this and future ages in religious holiness placed to their account at the great day, as being the genuine offspring of their care and solitude, and unshaken fidelity in the cause of God and of his Christ!

Fifthly, the great measure of folly and vanity and self-love there is in the best of our actions is what seldom falls under our notice; and yet from such secret errors who is free? We hardly know our own hearts well enough to answer at all times for the integrity of our intentions. How much of our virtue and religion is mere respect to common decency, and arises from no higher spring than a regard to our own credit and reputation, is more than we can certainly tell. When we are most eager in pursuit of some good end, could we stop short and examine ourselves fairly, we should find perhaps that we were only gratifying some private passion, and that none of the best, perhaps malice and revenge, or some other inordinate desire.

To this account we may add the many vain imaginations

which are conceived in the heart, though never brought to life by action, but die in the womb, and are out of remembrance. Such are the ambitious man's imaginary scenes of honor and glory, formed and wrought up to a kind of life in a mere delusion of thought; which, fantastical as they are in themselves, do arise from real pride and vanity. Such the visionary enjoyment of sensual men, when the thoughts traverse all the forbidden paths of luxury and wantonness; where, though the phantom be airy and bodiless, yet does this dream of sensuality derive itself from no imaginary corruption, but from a real distemper in the mind, from inordinate desires and affections. Such is the secret anger, such the malice of the heart, which sits brooding over envious or revengeful designs, which it contrives within itself, and seems to execute on its enemies; and, for want of power or opportunity for real revenge, feeds itself with viewing the execution of its wrath, though only expressed in the images of fancy. Harmless and innocent as this revenge may seem, which spends itself in imaginary mischief only, yet it springs from the root of bitterness, and is too plain an evidence that we hate one another.

Lastly, when we come to repent of our sins, many of them may be secret to us merely through the weakness and imperfection of the memory, which cannot recollect all the various passages of a vicious life. These sins, however conscious we have been of them heretofore, with respect to our repentance are as secret as if we had never known them, and can only be confessed and bewailed in general terms.

Thus have I set before you the several kinds of our secret sins. One general character there is which belongs to them all, namely, that they are such as we cannot, not such as we will not remember: for though the mercy of God will cover our defects, when they are unavoidable, and such as arise from our natural weakness and infirmity; yet we have no reason to expect any allowance, where we are wanting to ourselves through laziness and indisposition: where, to avoid the trouble or the anguish of repentance, we cover our own sins deceitfully. Such hypocrisy will be no plea in his presence, 'who trieth the heart and reins, and spieth out all our ways.' But,

Secondly, we are to consider what guilt we contract by our

secret sins, lest it should be thought that the sins which escape our knowlege ought not to burden our conscience. Where there is no guilt, there needs no remission; and if we cannot in justice be charged with our secret sins, there is no sense in the Psalmist's petition, 'Cleanse thou me from secret faults.' In another place he has told us, 'that God sets our iniquities before him, and our secret sins in the light of his countenance:' and the day approaches, when 'for all these things he will call us into judgment.'

In the instances already set before you, you may observe that our most secret sins are sometimes the most heinous. Thus it is in the case of habitual sins; we are too well acquainted with them to take particular notice of them; they are the involuntary motions of a second nature, and we are as little concerned to count their number, as we are the beatings of our pulse. But shall this plead their excuse? Shall only fearful sinners and modest beginners be punished? and shall the height of iniquity, because it takes away all shame and sense of sin, take away likewise all danger of judgment? This can agree with no rule of justice or equity; for by this means the same man will stand chargeable with the guilt of his early sins, such as he committed before his conscience was quite hardened, and yet not accountable for the more enormous crimes of sinful wickedness: as if the only sin we could commit, were to be sensible of our faults.

The same might be made appear in the other instances: for every 'idle word,' how soon soever it slips out of our memory, for every vain imagination of the heart, how soon soever it vanishes away, we shall 'give an account at the day of judgment.' For the guilt of sin does not arise from the power of our memory, nor is it extinguished by the weakness of it: if it were, forgetfulness would be the surest repentance; and want of thought and reflexion, which is so often represented in Scripture as the aggravation of sin, would be the sinner's best security. But, alas! though we forget, there is One who cannot, before whom our iniquities are ever present; who will enter into judgment with us, as well for the sins which we cannot remember, as for those we cannot forget.

The consequence from the whole is this: that since many of

our sins are secret to us, they can only be repented of in general; and since many of our secret sins are very heinous, they must seriously and solemnly be repented of. By general repentance you are not to understand then a slight or superficial repentance only. The petition of the Psalmist, 'Cleanse thou me from secret faults,' proceeded from a heart deeply affected with the sense of its guilt, and does not express the sentiments of one who was excusing or lessening his faults; for he remembered, and so must we, that secret as our faults are, yet God has placed them 'in the light of his countenance.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXXVI.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XII.—VERSE 36.

PART I.

It is evident from the context, that our Saviour intended to distinguish between the heinous offences of blasphemy, perjury, &c. and the idle words mentioned in the text. Of these there are many sorts. First; such as proceed from the vanity and deceitfulness of men's minds, the empty boastings or pretences of pride, and the sly insinuations of craft and hypocrisy. Secondly; reports which often proceed from mere curiosity, and a desire of hearing and telling news, to the injury of our neighbor's credit or reputation. Thirdly; such words as are the impure conceptions of a polluted mind, which often pass for wit among those who *make a mock of sin.* Lastly, useless and insignificant words, which comprehend great part of the conversation of those who aim at nothing but present amusements, unworthy of a rational creature. These are the common sins of speech, comprehended under the general term of *idle words*, which, if persisted in, may prove of dangerous consequence to our souls. What these sins are, is represented under the several heads above-mentioned.

1. *Idle words*, proceeding from vanity or deceit, will comprehend the pretences and plausible speeches of the cunning, and the empty boastings of the vain-glorious man. In both these cases there is a want of truth, on which we ought to build whatever we say one to another. Truth and falsehood have the relation to each other of good and evil; and this is an essential difference; so that there always is evil where

there is not truth: many nice cases have been put on this question, whether we are always obliged to speak the truth? and though some have maintained that truth may be dispensed with when it is evidently for our neighbor's benefit that he should be kept in ignorance, yet it never was pretended that vanity or cunning would excuse the want of it. Our Saviour tells us that evil things proceed from an evil heart: now the evil that lies at the heart of a vain-glorious man is pride. There is no attempt in which men are more generally unsuccessful than in that of praising and extolling themselves: yet in spite of the sin and folly and disappointment that attend on it, pride will have its work; and wherever this evil has rooted itself in the heart, it will produce such sin and folly in the mouth as will be remembered at the day of judgment.

But vanity may be sometimes the vice of men otherwise good and virtuous; yet even theirs are, in this case, *idle words;* and men must answer for the praise and glory which they assume to themselves. It is dangerous at all times to speak of ourselves; if we have done ill, to excuse or deny it inflames the account; if we have done well, our Saviour tells us that we must call ourselves unprofitable servants. Nor is there much difference between a boasting pride and an affected humility, which lets others know what good we have done by lessening and discommending that which we think they ought to admire: so that in this respect the rule of prudence and the rule of virtue are coincident, that the less we talk of ourselves the better.

In the next degree is placed cunning and artifice, which make men very forgetful of the respect that is due to truth, whilst they direct their speech to serve some design of their own. There are many degrees of this cunning; that which aims at making a prize of the ignorance of others needs not be mentioned here. But the charge of *idle words* lies against a cunning less desperate and malicious, which distinguishes such men as deceive you by a show of kindness which is not real: he who courts

and caresses all that come near him, must allow himself a great latitude, and often be guilty of falsehood and hypocrisy. The man of general civility and address destroys the credit of language: but the advantage he has is from the folly and self-love of mankind; for most men cannot suppose a man insincere who commends and extols them.

But what account shall a man give of himself for living perpetually in a disguise; for deceiving all about him, and using the speech that God gave him for better purposes, in imposing on the folly and weakness of mankind? An account he must give, unless he can show the use and benefit of his fair speeches: this point enlarged on. But,

II. *Idle words* may comprehend the reports of envy and malice. A distinction made under this head between those who invent and contrive wicked stories to the scandal and defamation of their neighbor, and those who credulously take them up when so invented, and spread them. The first is a vice that the text has no name for: it exceeds all that can be meant by *idle words*, and must be numbered with blacker crimes. But even to believe without sufficient ground, or to report, when we do believe, the ill we hear of others, cannot be divested of malice and envy: it is a mark of an evil disposition; and the restlessness of some minds to disburthen themselves of an ill report which they have picked up, shows their readiness to do this work and drudgery of the devil; but when men spread such stories with pleasure, and rejoice in the scandal, then they share the contriver's malice or envy, and are to be ranked with him in guilt.

But there are others who, out of an itch of knowing and talking of other people's concerns, have their heads and tongues continually running on the affairs of their neighbors; often doing much mischief without being chargeable with any malice or design to injure; but *in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin;* and when men's curiosity leads them beyond their proper

sphere, they must answer for the mischief they do: it is not enough that we mean to do no ill; it must be our care and study to do none. Were it not for such busy talking creatures, it would not be worth a malicious man's while to invent a story of his enemy. God has provided every man with business proper to employ his time: what we can spare from the necessary cares of life, and those relaxations and amusements which nature requires, is little enough to lay out on the thoughts of eternity; nor are there ever wanting opportunities of doing good, in which all active spirits might be usefully employed: this point enlarged on.

III. *Idle words* may imply such as are the product of an idle and impure mind, &c. There is nothing more directly contrary to morality and good manners, than the liberty which some men take of entertaining company with subjects unfit for the mouth and ears of a Christian. Whether this be an employment which even common sense and reason should submit to, any one who is not quite lost to shame may determine. It is a great argument of the impurity of men's minds, when things of this nature lie uppermost, and are always at their tongue's end: and therefore for their own sakes they should confine such thoughts.

This impudent wit, in all persons abominable, is never more truly infamous than when found in company with grey hairs; when men seem to be feeding on the dregs of the pollutions of their youth, when the decay of nature calls for other thoughts. In calling these *idle words*, the expression does not reach to the heinousness of the crime; for nothing is more contrary to the modesty and purity of our holy religion, nothing more destructive of morality, than this lewd wit, whose present glory is shame, and whose future reward shall be confusion.

If men have the power of clothing their unchaste thoughts in cleanly language, it cannot be justly pleaded in mitigation of their crime; this possibly may be to sin more like a gentleman, but it carries an aggravation with it that cannot easily be

forgiven. To improve on vice, and take off that mark of infamy which God has set on it, is the highest abuse of reason and sense. To make lewdness agreeable, and recommend it by an artful address and pleasant wit, what is it but to convey the poison in a precious mixture, that may tempt the palate to admit it? Modesty is the outguard of virtue, and gives notice of the approach of vice : and when lewdness is so dressed up as to pass unsuspected, it proves but the more dangerous enemy within ; therefore we must expect to give a severe account for the time and words which we spend in this diversion, to that Judge *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*.

PART II.

Fourth division of the first part of this Discourse referred to. By *idle words* we may understand useless and insignificant words; which are spent to no great purpose either good or bad.

This sense will comprehend a great part of the conversation of the world, which aims at nothing but present amusement. Now it is worth while to inquire what guilt a man contracts by this kind of *idle words*. To discover whether useless though innocent conversation comes within the judgment of the text, the following particulars must be considered: I. the scope of our Saviour's argument in this place : II. the end and design of speech, which is the gift of God to mankind: III. the nature of man in general, and the different degrees of sense and understanding given to different men.

First, as to the scope of our Saviour's argument, it is evident that he descends from the greater to the less evils of speech ; from blasphemy he comes to the other evils which are generated in the heart, and from thence derived to the tongue. The form with which the words of the text are introduced, looks as if they were intended as an addition and improvement to the old doctrines of the law. The Jews knew that perjuries, blasphe-

mies, and such like crimes, would be punished; and therefore our Saviour merely mentions them without speaking of the punishment: then he adds, *but I say unto you*, which emphatical words denote the doctrine to be new, and founded on his authority: which same form is used in Matt. ch. v. and in other instances, where Christ enlarges our duty, and debars us from the least approaches to vice. Allowing this to be the case in the text, it follows that we have therein a rule implied for the government of Christian conversation, of the greatest purity, restraining us not only from all evil, but from the very appearance of it; from every thing with the serious demeanor required in a Christian; from such faults as bear no greater proportion to the evil things mentioned before the text, than anger does to murder, or a wanton look to adultery.

The text thus understood leads us to inquire what are these faults and levities of speech that are misbecoming a disciple of the gospel, as being inconsistent with a Christian frame of mind; for though it may not be our duty always to be meditating on the mystery of our redemption and the surprising love of God, yet ought we to preserve a consistency of character, *in conversation as becometh the gospel of Christ:* for we should consider that we are adopted sons of God, and candidates for heaven; and should such spend their time in uttering foolish jests, and entertaining idle minds with idle talk, till they are lost in a forgetfulness of God and themselves?

The part of a common wit or jester does not well become a man, much less a Christian: it is below the dignity of reason; still more so, when reason is improved by grace: and to this purpose is St. Paul's prohibition, when he forbids all *foolish talking and jesting, which are not convenient.* What our translation renders *jesting*, the original styles εὐτραπελία, which Aristotle reckons among his virtues, and defines it to be the *habit of jesting handsomely.* So that what passed in the heathen world for a virtue is forbidden to Christians; and it

is probable that our Saviour, by *idle words*, meant those jests which were so delighted in and bore so good a character: this subject enlarged on.

Secondly, with regard to the end and design of speech, which is the gift of God to mankind.

Speech was given us for the communication of our thoughts to each other: but though it be given for this purpose, yet *all* our thoughts are not to be disclosed as fit objects of discourse: we must judge what are proper, and must be answerable for the government of our tongues. A man may be innocent in having some thoughts in his mind, which he cannot innocently disclose; for though he cannot always choose his thoughts, he may choose what he will talk of. As to the proper ends of speech we may reason thus: God has made us reasonable creatures and fitted us for his service, and therefore expects a reasonable service from us: as he has given us all the good we enjoy, our duty is to praise him for his goodness, and raise in others a sense of gratitude: this is one end of speech. As he has made us liable to many wants, it is our duty to pray to him to supply them: this another end. Farther, the wants and necessities of nature, which are present, call for our help; we must by industry obtain the necessaries and conveniences of life; as this subject must employ a great part of our thoughts, so it is properly a frequent one of our discourse. Moreover, God has made us to delight in each other's company: we are sociable creatures, and there is a pleasure in conversation; whence it follows, that men may commendably meet for the maintaining and improving mutual love and friendship: another end therefore of speech is to be a bond of society, a means of bringing and keeping men together. If then it appears that men may meet for mutual society and conversation, it follows that nothing can render conversation unlawful that is not sinful: for God has made us for the society of each other, and has commanded us to love each other; and there-

fore, if our discourses are friendly and social, they are so far virtuous, as they serve the end of nature: this subject enlarged on.

Lastly: the nature of man is considered, and the different degrees of sense and understanding in different men.

This consideration must have place in this question, because the tongue cannot speak better than the understanding can conceive; which infers a proportion between the abilities of our mind and the soundness of our speech. To discourse profitably on the most profitable subjects, requires a clear conception and a distinguishing judgment; without which men only lower noble subjects. What then must the great body of mankind do? They must talk of such things as lie level to their capacities, since even they are fitted for conversation and have a delight therein: let them be prevailed on to abstain from envious and malicious discourse, from lewd and filthy jesting, which are too often ingredients of their conversation: for since God has designed them for society as well as others, and given them no great share of understanding, you can neither restrain them from society, nor exact more wisdom from them than they have received. This consideration will reach wiser men: you must not despise your weak brother, to whom charity obliges you to be civil and courteous. From all these considerations together, it appears that the conversation of the world on common and trivial subjects, is not blameworthy. It is a diversion in which we must not spend too much time: as if we so offend, we shall be answerable for our neglect of weightier matters; but otherwise, if we transgress not the bounds of innocence and virtue, we trust that our harmless though weak and unprofitable words shall not rise up in judgment against us.

DISCOURSE XXXVI.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XII.—VERSE 36.

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

PART I.

It is very evident from the context, that our Saviour's intention was to distinguish between the heinous offences of blasphemy, perjury, and the like, and the idle words mentioned in the text, as I shall have occasion to observe. We must therefore look among the more common and less crying sins of speech, to know what kind of words they are, which our Saviour threatens with an account at the day of judgment. Of these there are many sorts:

First, idle words may denote words which proceed either from the vanity or the deceitfulness of men's minds: and this sense will take in all the empty boastings and great pretences of vanity and pride, and all the sly insinuations of craft and hypocrisy; and there is no doubt to be made, but that men shall be accountable for words of this kind at the day of judgment.

Secondly, idle words may comprehend the reports which proceed oftentimes from mere curiosity, and a desire of hearing and telling news, by which our neighbor suffers in his credit or reputation; and questionless these words will be also remembered in the day of the Lord.

Thirdly, idle words may imply such words as are the impure conceptions of a polluted mind, which often pass for wit and entertainment among those who have learned 'to make a mock of sin.' Under this head will be comprehended 'the

filthiness and foolish talking and jesting,' which the Apostle to the Ephesians would not have 'so much as once named' among Christians.

Lastly, idle words may signify useless and insignificant words. This sense will comprehend a great part of the conversation of the world, which aims at nothing but present amusements; as if it were the business of a rational creature to divert his mind from thought and reflexion. How far words of this kind, when attended with no other evil, may expose a man to guilt, is not easily discerned; though I think it is evident at least, that a man may spend so much of his time in 'idle' or unprofitable 'words,' as to render himself obnoxious to an account for the misuse and misapplication of the reason and speech with which his Maker has endowed him.

These are the common sins of speech, which are comprehended under the general term of 'idle words,' which, if persisted in, may prove of dangerous consequence to our souls; 'for of every idle word we speak we must give account thereof in the day of judgment.'

What these sins are, I shall endeavor to represent to you in the following discourse, under the several heads already mentioned.

And first, by 'idle words' we may understand such words as proceed generally from vanity or deceit, which will comprehend the pretences and plausible speeches of the cunning, and the empty boastings of the vain-glorious man. In both these cases there is a want of truth, on which we ought to build whatever we say one of another. Truth and falsehood have the relation to each other of good and evil; and this is an essential difference, as we may learn from hence, that truth is the attribute of God, and consequently an essential good, and its opposite, falsehood, must be likewise an essential evil: so that there always is evil where there is not truth. Truth likewise is a part of natural justice which we owe to one another; for whenever we lie to our neighbor, we lead him into wrong notions either of persons or things; and mistakes in either kind may prove prejudicial to him: so that to speak truth to our neighbor is a branch of that justice by which we are obliged to do no man any wrong.

I know many nice cases have been put on this question, whether we are always obliged to speak truth? And though some have maintained that truth may be dispensed with when it is evidently for our friend's or neighbor's benefit that he should be kept in ignorance; yet it never was pretended that vanity or cunning were sufficient excuses for the want of truth.

Our Saviour tells us that evil things proceed from an evil heart. Now the evil that lies at the heart of the vain-glorious man is pride: he would fain appear to be something considerable, and make a figure; and therefore truth shall never stop him from setting himself out, and ascribing to himself such honors or riches, such wit or courage, as he thinks may merit worship and respect in the world.

There is no attempt that men are more generally unsuccessful in, than in this of praising and of extolling themselves. It is an headstrong vanity, that will not be confined to the prudent methods of hypocrisy and dissimulation; but shows itself so openly, as hardly ever to escape being discovered, and consequently seldom fails of reaping the fruit it justly deserves, which is scorn and contempt. And yet in spite of the sin and folly and disappointment that attend on it, pride will have its work; and wherever this evil has rooted in the heart, it will produce sin and folly in the mouth, such sin and folly as shall be remembered at the day of judgment. For the romances that pride and vain-glory lead men to are capable of no excuse; and therefore offenders of this kind must stand liable to all the threatenings which are denounced against those who take pleasure in a lie.

But vanity may sometimes be the vice of men otherwise good and virtuous; and though they will not lie to gratify their humor, yet they will be very ready to do themselves justice on all occasions, and set forth the good they are conscious of in themselves to the best advantage. But even these are 'idle words,' and men must answer for the praise and glory they assume to themselves. Besides, it is almost impossible to speak of ourselves and of our own works with pleasure, and to keep within the bounds of modesty and discretion, and not to expose the good we have done to be ridiculed and evil-spoken of by those who observe our vanity and weakness.

It is dangerous at all times to speak of ourselves: if we have done ill, either to excuse or deny it inflames the account; if we have done well, our Saviour tells us that we must nevertheless call ourselves 'unprofitable servants:' and whether this rule be observed by those who boast, and are always talking of the good they do, let any man judge. Our Saviour's advice about charity holds in all other cases of the like nature; 'our left hand must not know the charity our right hand does;' and whatever else we do that may seem good in our own eyes, should at least be kept from our tongue's end, for fear we should be found in the number of those who take to themselves the praise that is due to God alone.

One awkward way that some men have of letting others know what good they have done, is by perpetually lessening and discommending in themselves what, in their private thoughts, they think others ought to admire. But there is little difference between pride and affected humility; and whenever men delight to talk of themselves, it is to be suspected that pride and vanity direct them to the choice of the subject, though it may appear perhaps in the disguise of meekness and humility. If you think that you have done nothing worthy of praise or admiration, whence arises your jealousy that the world should overvalue you? and why all this care to lessen and debase yourself, unless you are conscious to yourself of something that in reason you judge ought to exalt you? If you labor to shun the praise of men, it is plain you think you have deserved it, and your pretended humility is the genuine offspring of pride and vainglory: for humility will no more make a show of itself than of other virtues; and where men are truly humble, they will not tell all the world of it; and therefore where they take delight in industriously undervaluing themselves, it can proceed from nothing but their desire of being thought humble: but to affect even the praise of humility, is pride and vanity. So then, in respect to this subject, the rule of prudence and the rule of virtue are coincident, that the less we talk of ourselves the better: it is a nice theme, and few enter on it who come off clear either of folly or sin.

In the next degree we place cunning and artifice, which make men very forgetful of the respect that is due to truth, whilst they

direct their speech to serve and support some end or design of their own. There are many degrees of this cunning: that which is so gross as to aim at making a prize of the ignorance of others needs not to be mentioned here. Men of this principle proceed farther generally than 'idle words,' and are out of the present subject through an excess of lying, and falsifying their words and oaths, as may best serve their purpose.

But the charge of 'idle words' lies against a cunning which is less desperate and malicious, and is the distinguishing mark of such men, who deceive you by a show of kindness which is not real. Now the man who courts and caresses all that come near him must allow himself a great latitude, since he must often bestow his smiles on the person he does not love, and his compliments on the person he despises: in both which cases he stands charged with falsehood and hypocrisy.

This man of general civility and address destroys the credit of language; for his words have no meaning; none at least that you can understand: he that says the same things to every body, must be supposed to mean them of no body. But the advantage these men have is from the folly and self-love of mankind; for most people are so well opinionated of themselves, that they cannot think a man insincere, who commends and extols them: from whence it comes to pass that a man will swallow the compliments when applied to himself, though they come from a mouth which he knows makes no distinctions.

But what account shall a man give of himself for living perpetually in a disguise; for deceiving all about him, and using the speech which God gave him for better purposes, to impose on the weakness and folly of mankind? An account he must give, unless he can show the use and benefit of his fair speeches. Say, which is yet more than you can say, that these words are innocent and harmless: they are at the best then useless and insignificant; and think how your excuse will sound, when the utmost you will have to say for yourself will be, that you employed the talent God gave you to no good end or purpose, only you hope you did no harm. But add to this, that you deceived the world; that by your servile compliance you puffed up the vanity of the proud, betrayed and exposed

the credulity of the weak, and possibly too have made a gain of this ungodliness, and then I think you need not be told what sentence a God of truth, of righteousness and justice, will pass against such deceivers and liers in wait for men.

But, secondly, 'idle words' may comprehend the reports of envy and malice, by which our neighbour suffers in his credit or reputation.

I would distinguish under this head between those who invent and contrive wicked stories and reports to the scandal and defamation of their neighbour, and those who credulously take up with the invention, and report and spread them. To contrive malicious and wicked stories, and wilfully to defame our brother, is a vice that the text has no name for; it exceeds all that can be meant by 'idle words,' and must be registered with the other black crimes, which stand in opposition to the lighter offences of the tongue. But even to believe without sufficient ground, or to report, when we do believe the ill we hear of others, cannot be excused of malice and envy. It is an old saying, *facile credimus quæ volumus;* and if so, to believe the evil things spoken of our brother willingly, is a great mark of an evil disposition, and shows at least that we should be pleased if they were true: and the restlessness that some minds are under, when they have picked up an ill report, to disburden themselves, and spread the story in the neighbourhood, discovers with what a ready mind they do this work and drudgery of the devil. But where men spread stories of ill report with pleasure, and rejoice in the scandal, they have sucked in with the story so much of the contriver's malice and envy, that they ought to be ranked with him, and not included under this subject.

But there are others, who, out of an itch of talking, and knowing other people's concerns, have their heads and tongues perpetually running on the affairs and business of their neighbours. These people are like the hawkers in the street, they disperse whatever comes to their hand, good or bad; if it be but news, it is all one to them: by which means they often do a great deal of mischief without being chargeable with any formed malice or design to injure. But in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin; and when men's curiosity leads

them beyond their proper sphere and business, they must answer for the mischief they do. He who is always talking of what does not concern him, must needs be guilty of many 'idle words,' for which he must answer; and for which he will be less able to answer, if his words have been prejudicial to the character or credit of an innocent man. You may well be asked, what you had to do to be so very inquisitive and talkative of what no ways belonged to you? The Apostle's rule is, 'that you study to be quiet, and mind your own business.' But you may farther be asked, how came you to launch so far out of your knowlege as to be in danger of hurting the interest or good name of your brother? It is not enough that you meant no ill, it ought to be your care, and concern, and study, to do no ill; and to do what proved ill inadvertently, shows that you were not so studious to avoid the occasions of evil; if you had, you would not have ventured where there was such evident danger of doing harm, as there always is where men will talk much of the affairs and characters of others. Were it not for such busy, talking creatures, who listen after all news, it would not be worth a malicious man's while to invent a story of his enemy. A man cannot carry a story far himself, nor would he possibly find many openly to abet his malice in defaming an innocent man; but there are always inquisitive busy-bodies, who catch at news, and spread it immediately like wildfire: and therefore by being talkative and inquisitive in these matters, though we acquit you of malice or ill design, yet you become the instrument of malice; you pull the trigger, though the other levels the piece at the innocent head; and since your curiosity and impertinence are unjustifiable, you can no ways excuse the consequences of them. God has provided every man with business proper for him to employ his time in. What you can spare from the necessary cares of life, and from the refreshments and diversions which nature requires, is little enough to lay out on eternity, on the thoughts of another and better life; nor are there ever wanting opportunities of doing good, in which all active spirits might be usefully employed. How much more innocent and diverting is it to advise and instruct the ignorant, to rejoice with your friends in their good, to comfort and to

mourn with them in their evil; or at least to pass the time in such discourses as are administered by innocent mirth and friendly society: how much better, I say, is this, than to sit trying and condemning your acquaintance, and fetching in all you know by turns to receive at your hands their sentence, not for the good or evil which they have done, but for the good or evil which you have heard of them? How entertaining soever you may think this diversion, yet you must remember the conclusion of the wise man's advice to the men of pleasure, 'Know, that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.'

Thirdly, 'idle words' may imply such words as are the product of a loose and idle mind, such as represent the impure conceptions of a mind polluted with lust and lasciviousness. This notion includes 'the filthiness and foolish talking and jesting,' which the Apostle forbids 'even to be named' among Christians.

There is nothing more directly contrary to morality and good manners, than the liberty which some men take of entertaining company on subjects, which are unfit for the mouth or ears of a Christian. A greater affront cannot be offered to civil company than to break in on their innocent mirth and conversation with filthy jests, which put every modest person to pain, and under a difficulty of behaving himself, whilst such things are discoursed on: though it is the pleasure the lewd jester delights in to put modesty out of countenance, and to set impudence and buffoonery in triumph over it. But whether this be an employment that even common sense and reason should submit to, let every one, who is not quite lost to shame, determine. It is a great argument of the impurity of men's minds, when things of this nature lie uppermost, and are ever at their tongue's end; and therefore for their own sakes they should confine such thoughts, unless they take pleasure in hiding the man to discover the brute, and to let the world see what pains they have taken to furnish their minds with a knowlege, which nature and common decency have ever strove to conceal.

This impudent wit is in all persons abominable, but never more truly infamous than when it is found in the company of grey hairs; when men seem to be feeding on the dregs of the pollutions of their youth, and entertaining their minds with

lust and sensuality in spite of the decays of nature, which call for other thoughts. I am almost afraid of calling these 'idle words,' because the expression does not reach to the heinousness of the crime: for nothing is more contrary to the modesty and purity of our holy religion, nothing more offensive to God and all virtuous minds, nothing more destructive of morality, or that tends more to introduce looseness and brutality, than this lewd wit, which sets at nought every thing that is chaste and pure, whose present glory is shame, and whose future reward shall be confusion.

If men have a knack of clothing their unchaste thoughts in cleanly language, yet it cannot justly be pleaded in mitigation of their crime. This possibly may be to sin more like a gentleman, but it carries an aggravation with it that cannot easily be forgiven. To improve on vice, and to take off that mark of infamy which God has set on it, is the highest abuse of your reason and sense. To make lewdness agreeable, to recommend it by an artful address and a pleasant wit, what is it but to convey the poison in a precious mixture, that may tempt and deceive the palate to admit the destruction? Modesty is the outguard of virtue, and gives notice of the first approach of vice; and when lewdness is so dressed up as to pass unsuspected, it proves but the more dangerous enemy within; and therefore we must expect to give a severe account for the time and words we spend in this diversion; and you may imagine how filthiness and lewdness shall escape, when God shall sit as Judge, who is all righteousness and holiness, and 'of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.'

DISCOURSE XXXVI.

PART II.

Fourthly, by 'idle words' we may understand useless and insignificant words; words which are spent to no great end or purpose either good or bad.

This sense will comprehend a great part of the conversation of the world, which aims at nothing but present amusement: and it is worth our while to inquire, what guilt a man contracts by these 'idle words.' All words that are in any respect injurious to God or man, or contrary to truth or good manners, are out of this question, which is stated on words merely impertinent; where the subject of discourse is mean and trifling, and not capable of yielding any profit or improvement to ourselves or others. Now to discover whether useless, though innocent, conversation comes within the judgment of the text, we must consider these following particulars:

First, the scope of our Saviour's argument in this place.

Secondly, the end and design of speech, which is the gift of God to mankind: for if we use our speech to serve any purpose contrary to the end designed by God in giving us speech, we manifestly abuse his gift, and for such abuse must be answerable.

Thirdly, the nature of man in general, and the different degrees of sense and understanding that different men are endowed with: this consideration must have place in this question, because the tongue cannot speak better than the understanding can conceive; which infers a proportion between the abilities of our mind and the soundness of our speech: the latter must be judged by the former; for a man cannot be obliged to utter more wisdom than God has given him.

First, as to the scope of our Saviour's argument: it is evident that he descends from the greater to the less evils of speech; from blasphemy he comes to the other evils which are generated in the heart, and from thence derived to the tongue: 'a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things.' What the evil things are, which are bred in the heart, our Saviour on another occasion tells us: 'out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.' These then are the evil things intended. But as a farther obligation on us to keep the door of our lips with all care, our Saviour adds, 'But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of

judgment.' Now the form with which these words are introduced, looks as if they were intended as an addition and improvement to the old doctrines of the law. The Jews knew that perjuries and blasphemies, and false witness, and the like crimes, should certainly be punished; and therefore our Saviour only mentions them, without adding expressly, that they should be punished; for that was well known and believed on the authority of the law: but then he adds, 'But I say unto you;' which words are very emphatical, and denote the doctrine delivered to be new, and founded on our Saviour's own authority, 'I say unto you.' The same form is used in the fifth of St. Matthew, where our Saviour, in virtue of his commission received from God, evidently is explaining and enlarging the old law: "Ye have heard it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill: 'But I say unto you,' Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment. Ye have heard it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: 'But I say unto you,' Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." The same is repeated in other instances; in all which you may observe that our Saviour enlarges our duty, and debars us from the least approaches to vice, and obliges his disciples to the greatest purity, to the strictest and severest virtue.

To the same purpose possibly does he speak in the text: "Evil things, you know, proceed from an evil heart; and your law teaches you, they shall be rewarded accordingly: 'But I say unto you,' that not only these evil things, but every idle word shall be brought into judgment." The only difference in this case is, that in the sermon on the mount the enacting words are more full, ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν, in the text they are only λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν· which, though they must be rendered alike in English, yet the former, according to the idiom of the Greek tongue, is an expression of greater weight and authority: but the difference is not so great, but that we may suppose our Saviour to use both on the same account, to distinguish the doctrine delivered on his own authority from the old received doctrines of the law. Allowing this, it follows that we have in the text a rule implied for the government of Christian con-

versation, which is of the greatest purity, and restrains us not only from all evil, but from all appearance of evil, in our conversation; from every thing which is inconsistent with the gravity and serious demeanor required in a Christian; from such faults as bear no greater proportion to the evil things before mentioned, than anger does to murder, or a wanton look to adultery.

The text then thus understood leads us to inquire, what are the faults and levities of speech, which are not great enough to be numbered with the evil things before mentioned, and yet have something in them misbecoming a disciple of the gospel; something that is inconsistent with that temper and frame of mind which are the ornament of a Christian spirit, and the result of a just sense and reverence of the high calling wherewith we are called: for though it is not our duty always to be meditating on the surprising mystery of redemption wrought by Christ, or conversing with heaven through prayer, and exalted thoughts of the wonderful things of God; yet since this must necessarily, as we are Christians, be a great part of our employment, we should, even at other times, when we are taken up in our worldly affairs, or in friendly conversation, preserve a decorum, and maintain a consistency in our character; that though we are not talking directly of the gospel, yet our 'conversation may be as becometh the gospel of Christ.' For, consider that you are a disciple of the cross, a candidate for heaven, an adopted son of God, a brother of Christ, and an heir of glory: and then consider what sort of behavior and conversation best become those who sustain so great a character. Should such a one spend his time and thoughts to utter foolish jests, to entertain idle minds with idle talk, till they are lost in a forgetfulness both of God and themselves, and every thing else that concerns either their present or future interest? Should such a one be the minister of idleness and looseness, and serve to no better purpose in the world than to furnish entertainment to the indisposition that loose and profligate men have to serious thought and reflexion?

The part of a common wit or jester does not well become a man; much less will it become a Christian: it is below the dignity of reason; still more so when reason is improved by

grace. And to this purpose is St. Paul's prohibition in his Epistle to the Ephesians; where, among other things, he forbids them all 'foolish talking and jesting, which are not convenient.' What our translation renders jesting, the original styles εὐτραπελία, which Aristotle reckons among his virtues, and defines it to be the 'habit of jesting handsomely.' So that what passed in the heathen world for a virtue is forbidden to a Christian; and it is probable that by 'idle words' our Saviour meant the jests which were so much delighted in, and were under so good a character. And this gives a reason why our Saviour spoke as introducing a new law, 'But I say unto you,' that every idle word shall be brought into judgment; because the preachers of morality had taught the contrary before, and placed the jester, the man of 'idle words,' among their heroes, and honored his talent of raising laughter with the title of a virtue.

There are no doubt seasons of relaxation both from business and religion; and innocent diversion maintains the vigor of the mind, as moderate exercise does the strength of the body; but as exercise must answer the strength and parts of a human body, so must your diversion be answerable to the temper, and frame, and character of a Christian: otherwise exercise destroys the man, and diversion corrupts the Christian.

We are made by nature, that is, by God, to be sociable creatures; and therefore in seeking society, in cultivating friendships with each other, we follow the instinct of nature; and what time we spend in discourse and mutual converse, if it serves no other purpose than to maintain a good friendship and acquaintance, yet cannot be said to be mispent; because in propagating love and good will among ourselves, we serve one end of nature, and are doing the work which our Father hath given us: and when company meet, he that can talk entertainingly on common subjects, and divert their minds with inoffensive wit, has an excellent talent; and if men are endowed with an happy conception, with a liveliness of expression to represent their own ideas to others, their conversation may be agreeable without exceeding the limits of virtue or innocence.

But a common jester, one who is sent for to company to

make sport, acts a part much below the character of a man or a Christian: for jesting, though it may be an innocent diversion, can never be an honest employment; it will not bear being made a profession; and therefore when men make it their business, it must needs be an unlawful calling; and the jester will lie exposed to the threatening of the text, to be called into judgment for every 'idle word' he speaks. And if you again set before you the dignity and character of a Christian, you will easily discern how suitably and with what a grace a Christian acts, when his whole business is to make himself laughed at. 'I said of laughter, it is mad,' says the wise King of Israel. This only difference there is, and let the jester have the benefit of it, the madman's folly and extravagance proceed from misfortune, the jester's from choice; and this choice will render him accountable for his extravagances: and whether he has not the best title to apply the text to himself, you must judge from what has been said. His talent certainly lies in 'idle words,' and therefore he falls under the letter of the text; his business is poor and sordid: he serves to no other purpose in the world than, like the fool in a great house, to make sport; and whether in this he sustains the character of a disciple of Christ, let all who have learnt Christ judge.

Consider likewise whether he can justify himself against the apostolical rule of 'conversing as becomes the gospel of Christ.' If you say that he means no harm, I will agree to it; and go yet farther, and add, that he means nothing: but whether this excuse will come well from the mouth of one, whom God has endowed with sense, and reason, and understanding, they who have not lost their own shall determine. But allowing the excuse, it will not exempt him from the judgment of the text; because by 'idle words,' as has been already shown, such words are meant as are capable of this excuse, as not being chargeable with any great evil. Lastly, add to the text the comment of St. Paul, and then by 'idle words' we must understand 'foolish talking and jesting, which are not convenient.' This may teach us what judgment we are to make from the scope and design of the text: but yet here we can find nothing directly pointing against common conversation, where the

subject of the discourse is poor and mean, and incapable of yielding any profit or improvement; and since we cannot directly conclude from the text, let us consider,

Secondly, the end and design of speech, which is the gift of God to mankind: for if we use our speech to serve any purposes contrary to the end designed by God in giving us speech, we manifestly abuse his gift, and must answer for such an abuse.

Speech was given us for the communication of our thoughts to each other; the mind is furnished with variety of thoughts and reflexions, some of which are proper for discourse, and some not: there are some things which a man cannot but have ideas of, some things which intrude on the mind, but are not fit subjects of discourse. So that though speech be given for the communicating of our thoughts, yet all our thoughts are not to be disclosed or brought into conversation. We must judge what are proper subjects, and must be answerable for the government of our tongues. A man may be innocent in having some thoughts in his mind, which he cannot innocently disclose; the reason is, because he cannot always choose his thoughts, but he can always choose what he will talk of. As to the proper ends of speech, we may reason thus: God has made us reasonable creatures, and fitted us for his service, and therefore expects a reasonable service from us: as he has given us all the good we enjoy, it is our duty to praise and adore him; to raise in ourselves and others a sense of gratitude and duty towards him: this is one end of speech. As he has made us liable to many wants and necessities, it is our duty to pray to him, and in all our wants to apply to him, both in public and private: this is another end of speech. Under these heads we include, with respect to reason, the contemplation of the works of nature and providence, which serves to give us a just sense of the power and wisdom of God; and with respect to speech, all discourses on these subjects, which tend to inspire others with the same awful sense of the Almighty: these are no doubt proper subjects for reasonable creatures and Christians.

But then farther, the wants and necessities of nature which are present, call for our help. We must by labor and industry supply ourselves with necessaries and conveniencies of life;

and as this subject must employ great part of our thoughts, so likewise great part of our speech; for we cannot live without the mutual aid and assistance of each other; and this necessarily makes the business of life the frequent subject of discourse. And a very proper subject it is, and men are usefully employed when they are learning themselves, or instructing others in the business of their trade or profession. So then this is another end of speech, that men may confer concerning the necessary affairs of life, and be mutually aiding and helping to each other.

But farther still, God has made us to delight in each other's company. We are by nature sociable creatures, and there is a pleasure in conversation, though we have no end to serve by it, no business to discourse of, nor any thing to ask or desire of one another. And since God has made us sociable creatures, and it is his will and express command to us, that we love and delight in one another; it follows that it is very lawful and commendable for men to meet for this purpose, for the improving and maintaining mutual love and friendship: and then another end of speech is to be a bond of society, to be a means of bringing and keeping men together.

Now then, if it does appear that men may meet for mutual society and conversation, it follows that nothing can render conversation unlawful that is not sinful: for God made us for the society of each other, and has commanded us to love each other; and therefore if our discourses are friendly and social, they are so far virtuous, as they serve the end of nature.

Now men may talk of many subjects which have no present profit or instruction in them, and yet they may serve this end of conversation, of making men delight in each other's company: and since love and friendship are such great gospel virtues, a man may safely dedicate some hours in the day to them without a prospect of serving any other end, and yet be virtuously employed. How often is it seen, that men by meeting accidentally, and discoursing only on common subjects, come to have a good liking to each other, which by degrees improves into love and kindness! How often too are the greatest enemies reconciled by being brought into company together! At first they hardly bear the sight of each other: were they to

talk of their own affairs, or even of any thing that would admit of a dispute, their resentments would flame out into anger and passion; but on common and indifferent subjects they make shift to bear with one another in conversation; which by degrees softens them into a mutual compliance, and restores the long-forgotten friendship and kindness: and will you say the time is ill-spent that ends so profitably, so much to the glory of God, and the good of men?

At proper seasons, and in proper company, we ought to choose nobler themes: we have all the works of nature before us; we have the history of Providence through many ages faithfully preserved in the sacred records; and we cannot be excused in overlooking these great subjects. We owe likewise to one another, whatever each other wants; we should comfort the weak, instruct the simple, rebuke the sinner; 'rejoice with them that do rejoice, and mourn with them that mourn.' To neglect the proper opportunities of performing these duties, is a fault not to be extenuated. But then they are as improper at some times as they are proper at others; and when well-minded but weak men unskilfully break in on these subjects, all that they get by it is the pity of good men, and the scorn and contempt of the wicked.

Since then society is a thing in itself commendable; since one end of speech is to be a bond of society, which is preserved by mutual converse; and since religion is not always a proper subject; it follows that, for the maintaining society, and for promoting love and friendship, men may innocently meet and spend their time on such subjects as offer, though the subject in itself does not tend directly either to the good of men or the glory of God. If this kind of conversation be blameable, it must either be a sin of commission, or a sin of omission. It cannot be a sin of commission, because it is supposed to be innocent; and I know no sin that a man can commit by being innocently employed or diverted. Neither can it be a sin of omission; for no positive act can be a sin of omission. A man may incur the guilt of omitting his duty, whilst he spends his time in this kind of discourse: and so he may if he talks of business or religion. If your friend or relation wants your immediate help, and you will stand disputing or discoursing of

religion, you incur a breach of charity, and are guilty of a sin of omission. So if you waste your time in talking impertinently, when you ought to be at your business or calling, to the neglect and impoverishing of your family; or if you leave no room for the duties of religion, no doubt but you are very guilty: but your guilt does not arise from the nature of your conversation, but from your misapplication of time, from the neglect of your proper business and duty; and your guilt will be the same, if you mispend your time, though you discourse on subjects ever so great and momentous.

But, lastly, let us consider the nature of man in general, and the different degrees of sense and understanding that different men are endowed with. This consideration must have place in this question, because the tongue cannot speak better than the understanding can conceive; which infers a proportion between the abilities of our mind and the soundness of our speech; the latter must be judged by the former; for a man cannot be obliged to utter more wisdom than God has given him.

Now to discourse profitably on the most profitable subjects requires a good share of reason, a clear conception, and a distinguishing judgment; without these qualifications men do but expose the noblest subjects they take in hand; and, in proportion, there are but few men thus qualified. I ask therefore, what must the rest do? Would you have them choose great and noble subjects, which they do not understand? Or would you have them hold their tongues? The first, I think, they ought not to do; the last I am sure they will not do. It remains then that they must talk of such things as lie level to their capacities, that is, of mean and every-day subjects: for these men are fitted for society, and have a relish of conversation, as well as brighter spirits, and they ought not to be excluded from it; and therefore they must be allowed to follow their genius, which is not likely to lead to any very useful or improving topics of discourse. It is fit, you may say, that these people should learn, and that others should instruct them; so say I too: but to be always under instruction is not very diverting, and not many will submit to it; and when men of the same stamp meet together, who shall be the instructor?

I think it would be a good composition, if we could prevail

so far with the meaner people as to restrain them from envious and malicious discourse, from lewd and filthy jesting, which are great ingredients in their conversation: for since God has designed them for society as well as you, and given them no great share of understanding, you can neither restrain them from society, nor exact more wisdom from them than they have received.

This consideration will likewise reach the case of wiser men: you must not despise your weak brother. Charity obliges you to be civil and courteous to him: and when a man of understanding is joined in society with a weak man, the discourse must be according to the meanest capacity; and it is sometimes a piece of charity to submit to the conversation of men of much less ability than yourself.

From all these considerations together then, it appears that the conversation of the world, on common and trivial subjects, is not blameworthy. It is a diversion in which we must not spend too much time; if we offend in this respect, we shall be answerable for the neglect of weightier matters; but otherwise, if we transgress not the bounds of innocence and virtue, we trust in Christ that our harmless, though weak and unprofitable words, shall not rise up in judgment against us.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXXVII.

EPHESIANS, CHAP. IV.—VERSE 28.

PART I.

THIS text contains a confirmation and explication of the eighth commandment: for since all men are not equally supplied with the necessaries of life, and those who are without them are forbidden to steal, they can be obtained only by purchase or exchange; and as the only thing which a poor man has to exchange is the labor of his hands, it follows that, as he must not steal, he must work: he has as many ways to maintain himself as the rich man has wants or desires: but this latter has often very wicked desires and sinful pleasures; and though to serve the rich be the poor man's maintenance, yet to these he is forbidden to administer: he must work with his hands only *the thing that is good.*

Moreover, since labor to the poor is the business and employment which God has given them to do, a man is not to rest satisfied with working merely as far as the wants of nature oblige him, and spending the rest of his time idly and wantonly; but if, through God's goodness, he is enabled to gain more than is sufficient for himself, he becomes a debtor to other duties, he owes a tribute to his Maker; and he is bound still to labor, *that he may have to give to him that needeth.* It is shown that both the rich and the poor are equally obliged to make returns to God suitable to their abilities. The text consists of four distinct parts: I. a prohibition; *let him that stole*

steal no more: II. a consequent injunction; *but rather let him labor:* III. a limitation of this duty to things honest and lawful; *working with his hands the thing which is good:* IV. the rule and measure of the same; *that he may have to give to him that needeth.* First, as to the prohibition: by this we are forbidden the use of all such means, for our own maintenance and support, as are injurious to our neighbour. The command, *thou shalt not steal,* was given to secure every man in the possession of his goods; and therefore the reason of the law reaches all sorts of fraud and deceit; and there are many things which, strictly speaking, we do not call stealing, but which must be understood as comprehended in this law, in virtue of the reason on which it is founded: this point explained. Some are apt to repine at the unequal distribution of the goods of fortune; and thinking that they have as good a natural right to a share as their possessors have, they assert that right whenever it is in their power to do so. Hence sprang the sect called Levellers, who were for having the world equally divided among its inhabitants. Their opinion is destructive of all law and justice, and makes void the command given against theft. It renders labor and industry useless, since he that labors can acquire nothing that he had not before; and if it prevailed generally, it would render the world a nest of idle vagabonds. It requires but few words to show the vanity of such a doctrine; for though we cannot produce a divine law ordering the distribution of this world's goods, yet property is evidently of divine right: for when God gave the command, *thou shalt not steal,* he confirmed to every one the possession of his goods: this point enlarged on. From whence it follows that no man can acquire the possession of any thing which is at present another's, without his consent fairly obtained; and to this right of his own establishing even God himself submits. The poor are his peculiar charge, and he stands engaged for their support; but neither does he force us to part

with our estates to them, nor does he give to the poor any right to serve themselves out of the abundance of others; but he has left them to be supported by voluntary charity: since God therefore has not, for the sake of the most necessitous, thought fit to break into the sacred law of property, no man can be warranted, whatever may be his wants, in transgressing it: but in consequence of this, it follows that he who has not enough of the good things of this life for his maintenance and support, is obliged to work for his living. And this is the

Second thing to be considered, as the injunction of the text; *but rather let him labor.* His wants must be supplied from the abundance of others; and therefore he must find some honest way of transferring to himself what at present is not his. This must be done by consent of the present possessor, which must be obtained by purchase or intreaty. A man may, if he pleases, part with his goods freely to others by way of gift; and it should seem that, what another freely gives, we may freely and innocently take. This raises a question concerning the lawfulness of begging; for if a man may lawfully beg, and can by that means raise a sufficient maintenance, then it does not necessarily follow that, because we must not steal, therefore we must labor. In this question we must distinguish concerning persons; for some have a right to be maintained by charity, and these have a right to ask for it. Charity is the inheritance of the poor: it is, as it were, their property: and therefore, if any one who is not an object of it, lives by charity, he invades the rights and property of the poor; and this is the worst way of stealing. Who are not objects of charity the Apostle tells us in another place; *if any man will not work, neither let him eat;* that is, if a man can work and will not, he ought to starve. Now no man ought to starve, who ought to be maintained by charity; for such have a right to eat thereof: from whence it follows that such as can labor, but will not, have no right to charity, and consequently have no right to ask it; and therefore beg-

ging, for such as are able to labor, is an unlawful calling, or a more specious theft : this subject enlarged on.

Since then it is not lawful either to beg or to steal, it follows that a man must labor, and by his own industry maintain himself and those who have a right to be maintained by him. The Apostle adds that he must labor, *working with his hands*;* which is our duty when we are not capable of any better work; for such as cannot live without it, must live by bodily labor. But the injunction is more general, and includes all kinds of labor, toil, or study, by which men may be serviceable to themselves or others: and it may properly be asked how far this duty extends, and whether such only are obliged to labor as cannot live without it.

Man was not made to be idle. God has not given him sense and understanding to sit still and do nothing. If he was made only to eat and drink, then indeed it would follow that those who have enough, need do nothing else; but if he is made for and is capable of nobler employment, then it is an absurd thing to ask, whether a man may be idle, provided he wants nothing? The necessary affairs of the world cannot be managed by the labor of the hands alone : the head must also be employed in things of the highest consequence : and every man owes it as a duty to God and his country to render himself useful in his station, &c. : hence all men are obliged to that kind of labor and work which is suitable to their rank. We generally say, that God has made nothing in vain : yet what is the rich man made for, if his business be only to eat and drink, and spend his estate? Sense and reason are great gifts of God : and if he has exempted our hands from toil, he will expect that we should improve our nobler parts, and will exact an account of the talents committed to our trust.

* Of this St. Paul himself was an illustrious example: see Acts xviii. 3.—Ed.

PART II.

We here proceed to the third thing, which is the limitation, by which we are confined to work only the things that are good, foregoing all unlawful means of supporting ourselves: *let him labor, working with his hands the things that are good.* Had not this condition been expressed, it might have been collected from the nature of the command; for if the law of God be superior to our necessities in any point, it must be in all. Our Saviour tells us that *man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God:* if so, then we must not for bread transgress any part of God's word; which would be to destroy life under the pretence of preserving it. As we are men, we are the servants of God, and his law is our highest obligation: as we are poor, we must serve men, which is the law of our condition; and this can never supersede the law of our nature: therefore no necessity can justify us in despising or neglecting God's ordinances: this point enlarged on. Hence we may learn what value there is in the excuse which servants and poor men usually make, when they are sensible that they are employed otherwise than they ought to be: they dare not desert the service of their master, on whom they depend for their livelihood; the work they do is his, and his is the guilt: the first part of this excuse shown to be false, as God is superior to man: the second, as reason, which is given to us for a guide, makes us principals in all the evil we do. It is therefore manifest that, as the law of our condition obliges us to labor for our maintenance, so the superior law of reason and nature obliges us to work only the things that are lawful and honest.

But it may be asked, what are lawful and honest employments? Now the labor of the poor depends on the wants and desires of the rich: but the things which men want are either the necessaries, or conveniences, or pleasures of life; and all

trades or callings are subservient to one or other of these. 1. God has made nothing necessary to us which is not lawful and honest: therefore all such works as those of husbandry, &c. may be pursued. 2. When men are furnished with necessaries, they may then look out for conveniences; and if the rich may lawfully desire and enjoy them, then the poor may lawfully provide them: this point enlarged on. 3. The next thing which may furnish employment are the pleasures of life. Some of these are very innocent, and some very wicked; and the rule in this case must follow this distinction: such pleasures as the rich may innocently enjoy, the poor may lawfully provide; such as are wicked may neither be enjoyed nor provided without guilt.

But there are some things, which, according as they are used, may administer to innocent pleasure, or to vice and immorality: as wine may either *make glad the heart of man*, or sink him below the level of a brute; hence the question, how far we may lawfully provide things of this kind? Now since the innocence or wickedness of these lies altogether in the use of them, he that uses them may be to blame, and he that provides them may be innocent: this point enlarged on.

When things in their own nature evidently tend to corrupt and debauch men's manners, they are capable of no defence. Whatever exposes religion to contempt, or virtue to ridicule, whatever makes vice glorious, or gives to lust dominion over reason, is of this kind. The stage considered in this point of view: inquiry also made whether gaming can be a lawful calling or profession for men to maintain themselves by. From previous observations it may be collected what is an honest labor: and we must follow our honest callings honestly. The next thing to be considered is, what is the measure of this duty; whether we are obliged to labor merely to supply our wants, or whether there be other duties which are to be answered by our toil. This the Apostle has settled in the last

place; enjoining us to labor, *that we may have to give to him that needeth;* so that we are to labor not only to support ourselves and families, but that we may also contribute to the necessities of such as are not able to work for themselves: nor will objects of our charity ever fail; since the more we gain, the more ought we to give; and for this end should we labor.

But there are many things which a poor man ought to provide for, before he can come to the exercise of charity: he must supply his own wants; he must also by his industry provide against the casualities and misfortunes of life: and this in consequence of the Apostle's rule; for the first piece of charity which a man is bound to, is to keep himself from being a charge and burden on charity; that there may be a greater maintenance for such as are truly necessitous: next to himself a man is likewise bound to provide for his family, children, and near relations: and this is a duty of nature; for the Apostle tells us, that *if any man provide not for his own, he is worse than an heathen*, &c. Nor must their present maintenance be his only care, but likewise their future welfare. But, it may be asked, what is the measure of this provision for futurity; and when shall we satisfy this duty? Answered: he who can get no more than is necessary for himself and family, is under no obligation to works of charity: but when he gets beyond this necessity, he is then obliged to provide for his own *future* wants and the *present* wants of the poor; so that to lay up in store for ourselves, and to give in charity to others, are concurrent duties.

But it must be allowed that charity is naturally the duty of the rich rather than the poor; and if it be the duty of the poor to give out of the little which they can earn by their hands, how much more will it be expected from those to whom God has given more than enough? who are appointed, as it were, his stewards; and to whom are committed the

good things of this world, that they may use them to the glory and honor of his name. The time will come when we must quit lands and houses, and all the possessions of this life: let us therefore *make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness.*

DISCOURSE XXXVII.

EPHESIANS, CHAP. IV.—VERSE 28.

Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

PART I.

THE words now read to you make up a complete sense, without depending on what goes before or comes after. They contain a confirmation and explication of the eighth commandment: for what the Apostle enjoins concerning labor, and working with our hands, is no more than the necessary consequence of the command, 'Thou shalt not steal.' For since all men are equal sharers in the wants and necessities of life, and the things which should supply these wants are unequally divided, so that some have more than enough, and some much less; it follows that the necessities of the one must be supplied from the abundance of the other. Steal you must not, and give perhaps he will not. The only way then by which you can come at the things you want, is by purchase or exchange; and the only thing a poor man has to exchange, is the work and labor of his hands: and therefore it follows as a consequence of the law, that since you must not steal, you must work, and purchase by your labor and industry the things which are necessary for your support and subsistence. In all that rich men do, they want the help and assistance of the poor; they cannot minister to themselves either in the wants, or conveniences, or pleasures of life: so that the poor man has as many ways to maintain himself, as the rich man has wants or desires; for the wants and desires of the rich must be served by the labor of the poor. But then the rich man has often very wicked desires, and often de-

lights in sinful pleasures; and though to serve the rich be the poor man's maintenance, yet in these cases the poor man must not serve him; and therefore the Apostle adds, that he must labor, 'working with his hands the thing which is good.' His poverty obliges him to serve man, and therefore he must 'work with his hands;' and his reason and religion oblige him to serve God, and therefore he must work only 'the thing which is good.'

Labor is the business and employment of the poor, it is the work which God has given him to do; and therefore a man cannot be satisfied in working merely as far as the wants of nature oblige him, and spending the rest of his time idly or wantonly; for if God has enabled him to gain more by his labor than his own wants and the conveniences necessary to his station require, he then becomes a debtor to such duties as are incumbent on all to whom God hath dispensed his gifts liberally. He must consider that he owes a tribute to his Maker for the health and strength he enjoys; that there are others who want limbs to labor, or sense and understanding to arrive at the knowlege of any art or mystery whereby to maintain themselves; and to these he is a debtor out of the abundance of his strength, and health, and knowlege, with which God has blessed him: and therefore he is obliged to labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, 'that he may have to give to him that needeth.'

To the great men God hath given riches, to the mean, strength and understanding; both are equally indebted for what they have received, and equally obliged to make returns suitable to their abilities: and therefore, as the rich man must honor God out of his substance, so must the man of low degree make his acknowlegement out of the product of his labor and understanding: and therefore men are obliged to use labor and industry in their honest callings and employments, first, to provide for themselves, and all who depend on them for maintenance; and, in the next place, to provide a stock to discharge the debt they owe to their Maker, by administering, in proportion to their ability, to the wants and necessities of their poorer brethren.

And this may serve to give us a general view of the sense

and reasoning of the text; which I shall now more particularly consider, according to the distinct parts of which it consists. And those I think are four: first, a prohibition, 'Let him that stole steal no more.' Secondly, in consequence of that, an injunction, 'But rather let him labor.' Thirdly, a limitation of this duty of laboring to things honest and lawful, expressed in these words, 'Working with his hands the thing which is good.' Fourthly, the rule and measure of his duty, 'That he may have to give to him that needeth.'

First, as to the prohibition, 'Let him that stole steal no more.' By this we are forbidden the use of all such means, for our own maintenance and support, as are injurious to our neighbor. The command, 'Thou shalt not steal,' was given to secure every man in the property and possession of his goods; and therefore the reason of the law reaches to all kinds of fraud and deceit by which men are injured in their goods and estate; and there are many things which, in propriety of speech, we do not call stealing, which nevertheless must be understood to be comprehended in this law, in virtue of the reason on which it is founded. The unjust acquisition of any thing is theft; for what you unjustly acquire, another loses, and suffers in his property, for the security of which the law against theft was enacted: and therefore, in the way even of trade, if you sell a commodity to an unskilful buyer for a shilling, which, according to the market price, is worth but sixpence, you are a thief to the value of sixpence: for of so much you unjustly defraud the man. He that is stronger than another may rob him by violence, he that is more subtle may do it by cunning; but if the injury in both cases be the same, must not the guilt be so too?

Some are apt to repine at the unequal division of the goods of fortune, and think that they have as good a natural right to a share of the world as those who at present possess it; and consequently that they may assert their right, whenever it is in their power so to do. From these principles sprang the sect known by the name of Levellers, who were for having the world equally divided among the inhabitants of it; and thought it very unnatural that one should be a lord and another a beggar. This opinion destroys all law and justice, and eva-

cuates the command given against theft and stealing, by laying all things open and common, and making all men joint proprietors of all things. It renders labor and industry useless; since he that labors can acquire nothing which he had not before; and were it a prevailing opinion, it would soon make the world a nest of idle vagabonds, by leaving no encouragement for the labor either of the body or the mind. But few words may show the vanity of this opinion: for first, though we cannot produce a divine law ordering the distribution of the things of the world, yet nevertheless property is evidently of divine right: for when God gave the commandment 'Thou shalt not steal,' he confirmed to every one the possession and property of his goods; since from that time, at least, it became unlawful for any man to wrest out of his neighbor's hands the goods he was in possession of. So that it is to no purpose in this question to inquire by what means men at first divided the world among themselves, or how one acquired in any thing a private right to himself; since we find this right and property declared and confirmed by a subsequent act of God. God is the supreme proprietor of all things; and it will not be denied but that he might at first have divided the world as he thought good; and this he may do at any time, since he cannot lose or forfeit his right: and therefore it matters not by what means the world was divided, when God confirmed the division, and established men in their right and property; since his confirmation gave a right, if there were none before. And hence it appears that property is established, if not by the law of reason and nature, yet by the positive law of God; which is to us the highest reason and authority. And from hence it follows that no man can acquire the possession of any thing which is at present another's, without the consent of the present proprietor fairly obtained. And to this right of his own establishing even God himself submits: the poor are his peculiar charge; his providence stands engaged for their support: but neither does God force us to part with our estates to the poor, or give the poor any right to serve themselves out of the abundance and superfluity of others; but he has left them to be maintained by charity, that is, by the free and voluntary gift of such as can spare from their own subsistence some part of what they enjoy.

Now none can have greater want than those who are objects of charity; and since God has not thought fit to break into the sacred law of property for the relief of these, no man's necessity can be great enough to warrant him to transgress the law, since the greatest necessity is made subject to it: in consequence of this it follows, that those who have not enough of the good things of this life for their maintenance and support, are obliged to work for their living: which is the

Second thing to be considered in the text, 'But rather let him labor.' Your wants must be supplied from the abundance of others; and therefore you must find some honest way of transferring to yourself what at present is not yours: this must be done by consent of the present possessor, which must be obtained either by purchase or intreaty. A man may, if he pleases, part with his goods freely to others by way of gift; and it should seem that what another freely gives, we may freely and innocently take. And this raises a question, whether begging be a lawful way of maintaining ourselves? If a man may lawfully beg, and can by begging raise a sufficient maintenance, then it does not necessarily follow that, because we must not steal, therefore we must labor; for it may be answered, we may beg. In this question we must distinguish concerning persons; for some have a right to be maintained by charity; and those who have a right to this kind of maintenance, have a right to ask for it, that is, to beg the charity of all well-disposed Christians. Charity is the inheritance of the poor; it is, as I may say, their property: and therefore, for any one who is not an object of charity to live by charity, is invading the right and property of the poor; which is by much the worst way of stealing.

Who are not objects of charity, the Apostle plainly tells us in another place, 'If any man will not work, neither let him eat;' that is, if a man can work and will not, he ought to starve. Now no man ought to starve, who ought to be maintained by charity; for such have a right to eat of charity: from whence it follows that such as can labor, but will not, have no right to charity, and consequently have no right to ask it: and therefore begging, for such as are able to labor, is an unlawful calling. It is indeed but a more specious theft: for

first, you do not fairly obtain the consent of the proprietor to part with what you by begging extort from him; which is a necessary condition in all just and lawful acquisitions. You represent yourself as an object of charity, pretend age, or sickness, or lameness, or some other indisposition, which renders you incapable of an honest calling. The charitable man, as bound in duty, relieves these necessities, and out of what he allots for charity, gives something to you. Here you manifestly deceive him; for did he know you, he would give you nothing; and therefore, by your false pretences, you fraudulently obtain his consent to part with his money to you: this is a direct cheat. Secondly, you diminish the maintenance of such as are truly objects of charity. If the money that is given charitably in this kingdom were applied only to proper objects, our streets need not be crowded with beggars: but since begging has been found to be a profitable trade, it has diverted the maintenance of the poor to a parcel of idle, lazy hypocrites, who are taught to whine and beg with as much art and care, as others are taught their lawful trades and mysteries. These common beggars are public robbers of the poor, and live out of their peculiar inheritance. The money which well-disposed people allot of their substance for the maintenance of the poor, these insinuating hypocrites, by their pretended wants and necessities, appropriate to themselves; so that their employment is like to that of a pirate, they lie in wait to intercept whatever comes to the relief and support of the poor. Now if common begging is but a disguised kind of robbery, and really injurious both to rich and poor, it follows that this crime, like all others, falls under the care and correction of the civil magistrate, and that laws made to restrain this evil, and to punish idle vagabonds, are founded in reason and justice; and accordingly all wise states have made provision to prevent and to punish this evil.

Since then it is neither lawful for you to beg nor to steal, it follows that you must labor, and by your own industry and diligence maintain yourself, and such others as have a right to be maintained by you. The Apostle adds, that you must labor, 'working with your hands:' which is your duty when you are not capable of any better work; for such as cannot

live without it must live by bodily labor. But the injunction is more general, and includes all kinds of labor and toil, or study, by which men may be serviceable to themselves and others: and it may properly be asked, how far this duty extends? And it will, I conceive, be no unseasonable digression to inquire, whether only such are obliged to labor who cannot live without it; or whether those who have enough to support themselves without either stealing or begging, are not likewise obliged to turn to some honest calling and employment?

Man, I think, was not made to be idle; God has not given him sense and understanding to sit still and do nothing. If man was made only to eat and drink, then indeed it would follow that those who have enough to eat and drink, need do nothing else; but if he is made for and is capable of nobler employment, then it is a very absurd thing to ask, whether a man may be idle, provided he wants nothing? for if he is not made merely to serve his own wants, then his wanting nothing can never be a reason for his doing nothing. The necessary affairs of the world cannot be managed by the labor of the hand only: the head must be employed in all matters of policy and government, in preserving peace and order in the world; and in all matters that concern the future and present well-being of mankind. These are matters of higher moment than to fall under the direction of artificers. These are things of the last consequence, and must be regarded; and therefore it is the duty of some to qualify themselves for these purposes. And every man owes it as a duty to God and his country to render himself serviceable according to the station he is in, and to qualify himself to discharge such offices of trust and power as generally fall to the share of men of his rank and degree; that when he is called on by authority to take any office on him, he may be able to discharge it with credit to himself and benefit to others. Those of the highest degree among us reckon it among their titles of honor that they are born counsellors of the kingdom: the consequence, I think, is extremely plain, that it is their indispensable duty, by labor and study, and knowlege of the laws and constitutions of their country, to fit themselves to be what they say they are. The

men of estates among us are generally intrusted with the execution of the laws in their country; and can it be a doubt, whether they ought to be fit for their employment or no? From these, and such like considerations, it appears that all men are obliged to that kind of labor and work which is suitable to the station in which God has placed them. We generally say that God has made nothing to no purpose; and yet, pray tell me what the rich man is made for if his business be only to eat and drink, and spend his estate? Can you justify the wisdom of Providence in sending such a creature into the world? There is work cut out for all creatures, from the highest to the lowest; all things in nature have their proper business, and are made to serve some wise end of God. The angels are his ministering spirits, they attend on and execute his commands. The inanimate things of the world have their office; the sun duly performs his course, and rules the day; the moon and stars rule the night: and if there be a man in the world who has no work, but was formed to be idle, he, among all the works of God, is the only thing that is so. Are not sense and reason great gifts of God? And if he has exempted your hands from labor and toil, by supplying you with necessaries and conveniences of life, will he not expect that you should improve your nobler parts? Will he not exact an account from you, how you turned your better talent, and what use you made of his more excellent gifts? Is it reasonable that a poor man should be accountable for not getting bread for himself by the labor of his hands, and that the rich man should be liable to no judgment for not getting understanding, which is a more valuable possession, by the work and labor of his mind? Bread is the nourishment of the animal, but knowlege is the food of the man: by one we grow to the world, by the other we reach to heaven. And has God made it an indispensable duty to labor for the meat which perisheth, and not required an equal concern and labor for the food of life and immortality?

DISCOURSE XXXVII.

PART II.

I PROCEED now to the third thing, which is the limitation by which we are confined to work only the things which are good, foregoing all unlawful means of supporting ourselves: 'Let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good.'

Had not this condition been expressed, it might have been collected from the nature of the command; for if the law of God be superior to our necessities in any point, it must be so in all points. The reason why we must not steal, but labor, is this: that we must not do evil, or transgress the laws of God, to supply our wants or necessities. And if for this reason we must not steal, neither must we lie or perjure ourselves, or do any thing else inconsistent with the principle or maxim on which this law is built. Our Saviour tells us that 'man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' If so, then must we not for bread transgress any part of the word of God: for if the word of God be as necessary to the life of man as bread; then to transgress the word to get bread, is really to destroy life on pretence of preserving it; it is sacrificing life and immortality to the belly, which must perish together with its meat. As we are men, we are the servants of God; and therefore to serve him is the law of our nature, which is of the highest obligation: as we are poor, we must serve men, which is the law of our condition, which can never take place of the law of nature; and therefore no necessity can dispense with the service of God, or justify us in the breach or contempt of his laws. Our Saviour's argument against covetousness holds likewise in this case; 'Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?' You may by the service of men get food and raiment, but by the service of God you hold your very life and being. When you have done your utmost to provide necessaries and conveniences for the support of life, you must depend on God for the continuance of it; for at his displeasure we all

perish : he can render all your care abortive, by shortening the life which you take such care to provide for; and therefore the wants and necessities of life can never be a justifiable excuse for transgressing the laws of God. For no man would give his life for bread; and yet he that disobeys God for the sake of any present or temporal advantage, does indeed hazard life itself for the sake of the conveniences of life. Since then no necessity can be great enough to excuse the neglect of our duty to God, it follows that the Apostle's limitation must always take place, and we must labor, 'working the thing which is good.'

From hence we may learn what value there is in the excuse, which servants and poor men usually make for themselves, when they are sensible that they are employed otherwise than they ought to be. They dare not, they say, desert the service of their master, on whom they depend for their livelihood; the work they do is his, and not theirs, and therefore he ought to be considered as the person acting, and not they; and consequently the guilt should be all his, from whose choice and will the evil flows, in which they are only instruments, not acted by choice, but by the necessity of their condition. The first part of this excuse is evidently false, on supposition that God is superior to man; for if God be your supreme master, then is it no excuse to say you served another master, when you disobeyed him. The excuse is likewise ridiculous; for though you depend on man for your livelihood, yet you depend on God for your life; and life is more than meat; and therefore to disobey the Lord of life to get a maintenance is impious and foolish. But neither will the other part of the excuse do any better service; for though we allow that the evil you do is not of your own choosing or contriving, but that you act as an instrument of another's will, yet will not this clear you of the guilt of the evil you do. This excuse may serve for a horse, but it will not serve for a man; for to man God has given reason and judgment to govern and direct all his actions; and that reason will make you a principal in all the evil you do. Poverty neither divests you of reason, nor exempts you from the rule and government of it; and therefore the poor man must live by reason as well as the rich, and must be judged by it too, and consequently can never be excused for acting con-

trary to what his own sense and reason direct. From what has been said, it is manifest, that as the law of your condition obliges you to work and labor for your support and maintenance; so the law of reason and nature, which is a superior law, obliges you to work only the things which are lawful and honest, that you may preserve 'a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.'

But you may ask perhaps, what are lawful and honest employments? In answer to this it must be considered that the work and labor of the poor depends on the wants and desires of the rich: for if a poor man spends his time in doing what nobody desires him to do, he may go unpaid for his pains; and when he has done, be as far to seek for bread as he was before. From hence it follows that you must be confined to some work which may answer to the wants or desires of life. Now the things which men want are either the necessaries, or conveniences, or pleasures of life; and all trades or callings are subservient to one or other of these.

God has made nothing necessary to us which is not lawful and honest; and therefore it is lawful to provide whatever is necessary to life; and therefore all trades and employments which arise from the necessary wants of life are lawful trades. Under this head come all the works and labors of husbandry, which supply the world with food, and nourishment, and clothing; and all other trades, which furnish us with such things as we cannot well be without.

When men are furnished with necessaries, they then look out for conveniences: and if rich men may lawfully desire and enjoy the conveniences of life, then poor men may lawfully provide them by their labor and industry: and this is a large field of work. Whatever is useful or ornamental in life may be reckoned under this head: and conveniences must be estimated according to the degrees and quality of men; and as long as men seek the conveniences which are agreeable to their station, and bear proportion to the plenty of their circumstances, they are blameless: if they exceed this measure, they fall into pride and extravagance, and the sins consequent on them, such as ruining themselves and their families, and misspending the substance which God has given them. But since

all conveniences are suitable to some condition or other, they may all be the proper subject of the labor of the poor, who work indifferently for all, from the prince to the commoner, without inquiring, or being obliged to inquire, into the circumstances or condition of the man who employs them, who alone is answerable for the prudence of his undertaking; and therefore likewise all trades and employments, which provide things useful or ornamental in life, are lawful callings.

The next thing which may furnish work and employment for men are the pleasures of life. Some pleasures are very innocent, and some very wicked; and the rule in this case must follow this distinction: such pleasures as the rich man may lawfully enjoy, the poor man may lawfully serve him in; such pleasures as are wicked may neither be enjoyed nor provided without guilt. I need not instance in particulars of either kind: to serve the lusts and passions of men; to make vice easy and practicable; to remove the obstacles which lie in men's way to wicked pleasures, is directly to become the servant of sin: this is a plain case.

But then there are some things which, according as they are used, may administer to innocent pleasure, or to vice and immorality. Wine may make the heart of man glad, or it may destroy and drown his reason, and sink him down to the degree of a brute. And hence a question may arise, how far we may lawfully provide things of this kind? And in the case already mentioned, it may be required whether it be lawful to keep public-houses, which are so often abused and made ill use of? Now, since the innocence or wickedness of these things lies altogether in the use of them, he that uses them amiss may be to blame, and he that provides them may be innocent. If you buy a sword, and stab a man, you that do the murder are guilty, but not he that either made or sold the sword. The same will hold in the present case: public-houses are necessary often to transact business in, to entertain strangers, or to receive men who meet to be innocently cheerful. These are all lawful things, and therefore here is a foundation for a lawful calling. This may indeed be abused; and what may not? By the same rule you must shut up not only public-houses, but most other houses too; for there are very few things sold, which are

not capable of being abused. Besides, since the thing in its own nature is indifferent, and may be either well or ill used, one man's using it ill cannot deprive another man of his right to use it well: and if, notwithstanding the excess of some, others may use the innocent pleasure, then they may be served by others in their innocent pleasure; because what one man may innocently enjoy, another may innocently provide; and consequently to serve them cannot be a crime.

When things in their own nature evidently tend to corrupt and debauch men's manners, they are capable of no defence. Whatever exposes or renders religion contemptible; whatever serves to make virtue and piety ridiculous, to make vice glorious, to give lust the dominion over reason, or to heighten the appetite after sinful pleasures, is of this kind. These considerations have carried many wise and good men unto an utter condemnation of the employments of the stage, as unlawful means of maintenance. And whatever may be said of the representations of the theatre in general; yet when they transgress the bounds of decency, and employ their wit and art to make virtue, and sobriety, and chastity ridiculous; when they treat the sacred laws of marriage with contempt, and paint out the villain who betrays his friend, breaks the laws of hospitality, and brings to ruin unguarded innocence, as an accomplished character, and fit for imitation, there can be no doubt but the employment is extremely wicked. And whenever the stage is so employed, every good man, every good Christian, must condemn it. Poets were anciently instructors of mankind and teachers of morality; and virtue never went off the stage without applause, nor vice without contempt. Thus heathen poets wrote!

It may be worth inquiring, whether gaming can be a lawful calling or profession for men to maintain themselves by? That there is room for this inquiry, is evident from the great numbers who live and thrive by it. Those who live on this art may say in their own excuse, what the unjust steward said for himself, 'Dig I cannot, to beg I am ashamed:' and I am afraid they are not unlike him in the method they choose to support themselves. Gaming may either be reduced from chance to art, or it may not. If it cannot be reduced to an art, then it cannot

be the subject of an employment to live by; for you will not say that a man may be maintained by that, which, according to the very nature of the thing, may as well prove his ruin as his maintenance: and therefore if gaming is built purely on chance, no man can or ought to make it his calling; because it can never answer the end, and bring in a constant supply for the constant wants of life. If gaming may by skill and practice be reduced to an art, then it is a very unjust art, and must be a dishonest way of getting money: for men venture their money on a supposition that they have an equal chance with you; but if you are master of a skill which can overrule this chance, you destroy the game by taking away the chance, which is the foundation of it; and you make your advantage purely of the ignorance and folly of others, and live by an art which you dare not own; for were it known, you could not live by it. So that, take it either way, to play on the square cannot, in the nature of the thing, be a maintenance, because it may equally happen to be your undoing; to play otherwise is a cheat and abuse on mankind, and cannot be an honest or fair livelihood.

From what has been discoursed in general, and on the particular cases mentioned, we may collect what is an honest labor or maintenance: we must follow our honest callings honestly. The next thing to be considered is, what is the measure of this duty; whether we are obliged to labor merely to supply our own wants and necessities; or whether there be any other duties incumbent on us, which must likewise be answered by our labor and toil? This the Apostle has settled in the

Fourth and last place, enjoining us to labor, 'that we may have to give to him that needeth.' So that the end we ought to aim at by our labor and industry is to enable us not only to support ourselves and our families, but to be contributors likewise to the wants and necessities of such as are not able to work and labor for themselves. Charity has no measure but the wants of others, and our own ability. The Scripture has told us, 'the poor shall never fail:' there never will want objects of charity, and therefore we can never get beyond this rule of the Apostle; for the more we can get, the more we ought to give, and therefore must constantly labor to enable

ourselves to answer this end in the best manner. But there are many things which a poor man ought to provide for, before he can come to exercise charity; the first poor man he is to take care of is himself; his own wants and necessities must be answered out of his labor. Nor is he obliged only to provide for his present wants, but by industry and frugality to lay up in store, out of what he can spare from his present maintenance, to provide against the casualties and misfortunes of life, which he, with all mankind, is liable to. He may be disabled by sickness, or lameness, or age, and rendered incapable of following his trade or labor; and these being such common incidents, he is bound to provide for them. This is evidently a consequence of the Apostle's rule, that we must work to serve the ends of charity. The first piece of charity you are bound to is to keep yourself from being a charge and burden on charity, that there may be the greater maintenance for such as are truly necessitous; and therefore it is a breach of this rule, instead of providing for futurity, to spend all at present, and leave yourself to be a burden on the common charity, whenever age or sickness disables you: so that it is a duty owing as well to your poorer brethren as yourself, to keep yourself, by the honest arts of labor and frugality, from preying on their maintenance, when your strength and labor forsake you. And hence it appears that, by the Apostle's rule, you are bound as well to thrift and frugality as to labor; and therefore such as work hard, and spend freely all they get, are highly to be blamed, and may be found at last to have spent out of the poor's stock; since by squandering their own they come at last to a necessity of living on charity; by which means others are straitened, that they may be supplied.

Next to yourself you are likewise bound to provide for your family, for your children, and near relations. This is a duty of nature; and the Apostle has told us, 'If any man provide not for his own, especially those of his own household, he is worse than an heathen, and hath already denied the faith.' Nor must their present maintenance be your only care, but likewise their future well-being: for the same reasons which oblige you to lay up in store for yourself against future calamities, oblige you to do the same for your family. But what is the measure,

you will say, of this provision for futurity? Who can guess how much himself or his family may want hereafter? And when shall we satisfy this duty, so as to be able to begin the other of being charitable to our poorer brethren? Our own present wants must be supplied; and therefore he who can get no more than is necessary for the present maintenance of himself and family, is under no obligation to give to charity: but when we get beyond this necessity, we are then obliged to provide for our own future wants and the present wants of the poor; so that I reckon to lay up in store for ourselves, and to give in charity to others, are concurrent duties.

But it must be allowed that charity is naturally the duty rather of the rich than the poor. And if it be the duty of the poor to give to charity out of the little their hands can earn, how much more will it be expected from such to whom God has given more than enough! who are appointed stewards over his household, and are intrusted with the good things of the world, that they may use them to the honor and glory of his name, and to the comfort and relief of their poor brethren. He has given you plentifully, and made the things you enjoy to be your own; he has secured to you your possessions, and commanded that no man rob or steal from you, on purpose that you may show your love by the freedom of your offering. Look down and behold the toil and labor of mankind, how in the sweat of their brow they eat their bread; how their hands are galled with work, and their shoulders with burdens: and then look up to Him, who has exempted you and given you a life full of ease and comfort, and reflect what it is you owe to this kind, to this bountiful God. The time will come when you must quit your lands and your houses; when you shall be suitors for mercy and favor: 'make to yourselves therefore friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,' that when all shall leave and forsake you, you may be received into the habitations of righteousness, where there is mercy, and peace, and joy for evermore.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXXVIII.

I PETER, CHAP. IV.—VERSE 8.

PART I.

THE high esteem in which the great virtue of charity was held by St. Peter is shown by the distinguishing manner in which he introduces the exhortation in the text. The excellency of charity is explicitly set forth by St. Paul in 1 Cor. xiii., where he does not merely compare it with, and prefer it before all spiritual gifts, but declares that without it all these are of no profit to salvation. It is of the utmost consequence therefore, that we should rightly understand this great virtue, that we may use the proper methods of attaining to it. Its nature must be considered, that the text may be rightly understood. St. Peter affirms that charity *shall cover the multitude of sins;* and as it is evident that this great promise must be ascribed to that virtue only which the writer of the text had in his mind, if we apply it to any thing else, we abuse his authority and deceive ourselves. The discourse confined to two inquiries: I. what that fervent charity is, which the Apostle recommends: II. what is the meaning of his affirmation that it *shall cover the multitude of sins.*

First: it will appear by the words used, that he is not recommending any particular duty; much less any particular acts of duty. The words in the original, rendered by our translators *fervent charity* are *ἀγάπην ἐκτενῆ*, *continual* or *uninterrupted love.* It is therefore the principle of charity, or a general beneficence of mind, which the Apostle recommends:

and this must be constant and regular, not subject to passion or resentment, but presiding over all the desires of the heart: charity is thus distinguished from good-nature, a quality which results rather from a man's constitution than his reason, and which often needs correction in its very principles; being sometimes an agreeable and easy weakness of mind, or an indolence and carelessness with respect to persons or things. Charity is reason made perfect by grace; it is a beneficence which arises from a contemplation of the world, from a knowlege of the great Creator, and the relation we bear to him and to our fellow-creatures: the character, the temper, and the duty of a disciple of the gospel are all comprehended in this virtue. Actions of the same sort may proceed from different principles: thus liberality and hospitality, the natural effects of charity, may be produced by pride and vanity. This leads to an inquiry, how we may certainly distinguish the principles from which our actions proceed: the ready answer to this is, that we must consult our own hearts: but since to search the heart, and to examine the principles of action, are the same thing, this will not forward our inquiry. The difficulty of arriving at the knowlege of our own hearts shown. Though in actions which require deliberation, an honest man may judge of his own motives, yet there are many things which men do habitually, and with such ease and readiness, as not to attend to the motive at the time of action: it is hardly possible for us to estimate the good or evil of our actions, by considering the immediate and sensible connexion between each act and the motives which produce it: for as many motions of the body, which depend on the acts of our will, are exerted with the greatest reason, and yet the reason of exerting them is but seldom if ever attended to; so, in moral actions, a man of confirmed habitual goodness does many things right, without recurring by reflexion to the special grounds of duty on which their morality is founded. Hence it seems a very distracting

method to set people on an inquiry into the motives of all their particular actions; and it is still more improper to exclude sincerity from all actions that are not immediately influenced by true motives of religion.

We must therefore search after a more equitable and practicable way of judging of our sincerity. Our Saviour tells us, we must *love our neighbor as ourselves:* this therefore will be a sufficient evidence or test of our charity.

Now it is certain that the principle of self-preservation does generally act so uniformly in men, that they do the things most necessary to their own well-being without much thought on the reasons for so doing; nor do we ever suspect the sincerity of their motives.

What the principle of self-preservation is with respect to ourselves, the same is charity with respect to our neighbor: and the more real and vigorous this principle is, the more easily, and with the less deliberation, does it exert its acts of beneficence: hypocrites have a design, and therefore they deliberate: but it is a great presumption that a man acts on a general principle of charity and humanity, when he lives well towards others, without having a particular reason to assign for every instance of so doing.

This rule however is not so strict, as that men should be always condemned for the good they do to others with a view to themselves: for it is as reasonable to exchange good offices as other less valuable conveniences of life; and the Apostle himself exhorts us *to provoke one another to love and to good works.*

The surest way to know whether we are influenced by a true principle of charity, is to consider, not this or that particular action, nor our behavior with respect to particular persons; but to reflect on our carriage towards all in general, and in all instances; for the true principle will discover itself in the uniformity of our actions.

If therefore we find that our sentiments of humanity are confined to certain persons or parties, we may be sure they are the product of some partial narrow views, and not the genuine offspring of true charity, which is in its nature extensive and universal: or if we find ourselves acting in some instances justly and mercifully, whilst in others we are regardless of mercy and justice, we have not the virtue of charity: this point enlarged on.

The rule here recommended is the same which the Apostle in effect describes 1 Cor. xiii.; where he speaks of spiritual gifts, and shows that without charity they are of no use.

Thus the Scripture rule of judging ourselves in this great point of charity, is to compare our conduct with the precept, and to consider whether our actions are uniformly suited to the principle by which we pretend to act. When we find a constant benevolence in our minds, and that we act conformably to it within the rules of reason, why should we doubt of our own sincerity, or scrupulously examine the special motives which attended every charitable act? Such an examination shown to be unreasonable.

Conclusion: we see the extensive nature of charity, as well as a plain and natural way of judging whether we possess it. If we allow ourselves in any instance to injure our neighbor, how can we be said to love him? Whatever therefore be the darling passion, which makes us transgress against our brother, that it is which destroys in us this most excellent grace of charity.

PART II.

Consideration of the sense in which the Apostle's assertion is to be understood, *that charity shall cover the multitude of sins.* To *cover sins* signifies to excuse and exempt them from punishment: in no other sense is it possible for sins to be covered in the sight of God. With respect to the judgment of men, this

expression will bear a stronger exposition; for whether we consider the charitable person as judging of other men's sins, his charity may incline him to judge better of sinners than they deserve; or whether we consider others as judging of the charitable person's own offences, it is natural for men to be so charmed with the excellency of charity, as not to see the defects which are in such good company.

Which of these two expositions ought to prevail, depends on a farther inquiry; viz. whether the Apostle in the text had respect to the judgment of God or of men.

We must also consider of whose sins he speaks; and whether he means to affirm that charity shall cover those of the charitable person, or of other people.

Probable reasons may be given for each interpretation: these examined.

First; there are good reasons to be assigned for limiting the Apostle's assertion to the judgment of men. Hatred, says Solomon, *stirreth up strifes, but love covereth all sins:* where *covering of sins* being opposed to *stirring up strifes*, the meaning needs must be, that as hatred generates animosities, so love allays intemperate heats, and inclines men to overlook offences: this point enlarged on. Charity therefore, as it naturally inclines us to forgive the offences of our brethren, so it puts us into that peaceful state of mind which may best enable us to prepare for our great Judge. In this sense St. Peter's assertion agrees exactly with the accounts of charity in other places of Holy Scripture, and with those properties ascribed to this virtue by St. Paul. Besides, the expression, *the multitude of sins*, leads to this interpretation: when the Apostle put the question to our Lord, *how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?—till seven times?* Jesus answered, *I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven:* from which St. Peter could not but learn that the property of charity was to *cover the multitude* of a brother's sins. Moreover,

it is more reasonable to think that a truly charitable man should meet with a multitude of sins in other people for the exercise of his charity, than that he should have a multitude of his own to cover: we meet with no such description of charity in Scripture, as may lead us to suppose it is consistent with a multitude of sins.

If it be thought that the text, thus interpreted, holds forth no great comfort or encouragement to charity, since the benefit accrues to others, it must on the other side be considered, how blessed a state it is to enjoy a calm serenity of mind, whilst the world around us is agitated by the storms of passion; and how happy we shall be if we are so found when we are summoned by our great Master.

Secondly: there may be reasons for expounding the text of the judgment of God, and yet the Apostle's assertion may still relate to the sins of others, and not to those of the charitable person. But, it may be said, may one man's sins be covered in the sight of God by another man's charity? Yes, they may: and in this sense the very expression of the text is made use of by St. James, ch. v. 20.; where it is evident that the sins to be covered are those of the soul that is saved from death; and this is proposed as a strong incitement to every charitable person, to labor for the conversion of a sinner: this point enlarged on: were the several works of charity to be enumerated, its instruction of the ignorant, its encouragement of the weak, its rebuking of the presumptuous, &c. we should soon see how instrumental it is in covering the sins of others.

Third and last inquiry; viz. what encouragement we have from reason and Scripture to expect that by charity we may cover our own sins.

In the verse before the text, the Apostle gives us this warning, *the end of all things is at hand.* To this solemn notice he subjoins a proper exhortation; *be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer; and above all things have fervent charity*

among yourselves: and as a reason for this, he observes, *for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.* Hence arises a presumption that the Apostle might mean to instruct each person how to cover his own sins: for when we look to future judgment, of whose sins do we think, or for whose offences do we tremble, but our own? Besides, the exhortation to mutual charity being subjoined to the mention of prayer, may show the Apostle's intention to instruct us how to hide our own offences: as it is in the Lord's prayer. Farther, the nature and extent of charity considered, there is an additional argument to confirm the charitable man in the hopes of pardon for his own offences: for charity is *the fulfilling of the law:* it is *the royal law,* as St. James calls it, which *whosoever fulfils, shall do well:* and in this view St. Peter's advice in the text is equivalent to that of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, ch. iv. 27. For these reasons, it may be allowed that the Apostle meant to exhort us to charity, as a proper means to obtain forgiveness of our sins from God: but to prevent mistakes in so important a matter, a few observations are offered.

First; we must not so expound this text as to make it contradict the general terms of pardon and reconciliation proposed in the gospel, which only gives hopes of this through sincere repentance and amendment of life. The words of the text, it is seen, are capable of various interpretations, and therefore cannot be so strong in any one sense as to control the meaning of more plain and express declarations of holy writ, &c.

Secondly; we must not so expound this or any other passage of Scripture, as to raise up a doctrine reproachful to God, or inconsistent with his attributes. With the Almighty dwelleth truth and justice, and in his court there is no commutation for iniquity; no excuse or pardon but by forsaking it. Under these limitations, it is considered how far we may apply this sovereign remedy of charity to our own sins.

We may consider our sins as past, present, and to come.

With respect to our past sins, it is out of our power to recal them; with respect to our present, it is in our power to forsake them; with respect to those which are to come, it is in our power to avoid them. To begin with the last.

No sort or degree of charity can so far vacate the duties of religion as to make it unnecessary for us to avoid occasions of sin for the time to come; the very remedy, if applied to this purpose, would turn to poison. Next, as to our present sins: as it is in our power, so it will ever be our duty, to forsake them; nor can any thing dispense with this obligation. We must not therefore pretend to balance our good and evil, and fondly imagine that our virtues so far exceed our iniquities, that these may safely be enjoyed: for our Saviour tells us that *when we have done our utmost, we are unprofitable servants.* Lastly, as to our past sins: it is not in our power to recal them. Here therefore the goodness of God has provided a remedy. This is the only case in which we have any encouragement to seek for a cover for our sins. Repentance and amendment of life is required; and as charity is the perfection of the law, to forsake sin, and to live by the rules of charity, is the best way to obtain pardon.

But even in this case we must guard against mistakes: for though a return to our duty and works of charity are the best amends we can make for the guilt of past offences, yet charity will not be accepted of God in lieu of justice: if we have injured one person, our debt to him will not be paid by charity to another. First pay the debts of justice, and then think of charity: till those are discharged, let no one imagine that his *charity will cover the multitude of sins.*

DISCOURSE XXXVIII.

I PETER, CHAP. IV.—VERSE 8.

And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves; for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

PART I.

THE exhortation in the text being joined with other exhortations to sobriety and watchfulness in prayer, to hospitality, and to a faithful use and exercise of the gifts and graces of God bestowed on the several members of the church; and yet, being introduced in this distinguishing manner, 'Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves,' plainly shows how highly the Apostle esteemed this great virtue of charity; and that it is the perfection of a Christian, the very life and soul of all other duties, which without this are empty performances, and of no value in the sight of God.

This excellency of charity, which we collect from the peculiar manner in which St. Peter recommends it to the practice of Christians is fully and expressly set forth by St. Paul in 1 Cor. xiii., where, speaking in his own person, he says, 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowlege; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.' It is to be observed that St. Paul does not merely compare and prefer charity before all spiritual gifts and attainments, before liberality and almsgiving;

but he declares that these without charity are nothing, of no value in the sight of God, of no profit to the salvation of man. Is it not therefore of great consequence to us rightly to understand this great virtue, that we may use proper methods to attain it; since it is that only which can sanctify our offerings to God, and make either our prayers or praises, or our alms and oblations, acceptable in his sight; since it is that only which can make the gifts and abilities bestowed on us of any use, or render them a proper means to save ourselves and others?

It is necessary to enter into the consideration of the nature of this great virtue, that we may rightly apprehend the meaning of the text. St. Peter affirms that 'charity shall cover a multitude of sins.' Whatever we are to understand by this expression, it is evident that this great promise or effect must be ascribed to that virtue only, which the Apostle had in his mind, and which he meant to express in the words of the text; and if we apply it to any thing else, we abuse his authority and deceive ourselves. I shall therefore confine this discourse to two inquiries:

First, what that 'fervent charity' is, which the Apostle in the text so earnestly recommends; and,

Secondly, what is the true meaning of the Apostle's affirmation concerning this charity, that 'it shall cover the multitude of sins.'

As to the first inquiry, it will appear by the language made use of by St. Peter, that he is not recommending any particular duty, much less any particular acts of duty. (The words in the original, rendered by our translators 'fervent charity,' are ἀγάπην ἐκτενῆ, 'continual' or 'uninterrupted love.') Love is a principle, or a good habit of mind, from which many duties flow, but does not denote any one kind of duty more than another; and therefore the charity spoken of in the text has no more immediate relation to 'almsgiving' (as the use of the word in our language often leads people to think it has) than it has to patience, forgiveness of injuries, or any other natural effect of love or charity. It is therefore the principle of charity, or a general beneficence of mind towards one another, which the Apostle recommends. And this must be constant

and regular, not subject to the efforts of passion or resentment; it must preside with a superiority over all the desires of our heart, that neither wantonness and lust, nor anger and revenge, nor covetousness and ambition, may carry us aside from the ways of righteousness and equity in our dealings one with another.

This description distinguishes the virtue of the gospel from what the world means by good-nature, which seems to be a quality resulting rather from the constitution, than from the reason of a man, and is frequently subject to great efforts of passion and resentment; to the desires of ambition and lasciviousness, and other vices, which have no society, which can have none, with Christian charity. Good-nature has oftentimes something that wants to be corrected in the very principles of it; sometimes it is an agreeable and easy weakness of mind, or an indolence or carelessness with respect to persons and things. But charity is reason made perfect by grace: it is a beneficence which arises from a contemplation of the world, from a knowlege of the great Creator, and the relation we bear to him and to our fellow-creatures: it is that reason into which all duties owing from man to man are ultimately resolved; and when we choose to say in a word what is the character, the temper, or the duty of a disciple of the gospel, 'charity' is the only word that can express our meaning.

The same sort of actions materially considered, do oftentimes proceed from very different principles. Liberality and hospitality are natural effects of charity, which inspires us with the tender emotions of compassion and benevolence towards our fellow-creatures: but it is no very uncommon thing for men to be liberal out of pride, and hospitable out of vanity; 'to do their alms before men, that they may be seen of them;' and of such our Saviour's judgment is, that they 'shall have no reward of their Father, which is in heaven.'

This leads to an inquiry, by what means we may certainly distinguish the principles from which our actions are derived, without which we can have no well-grounded confidence towards God, how specious soever the appearance may be which we make in the eyes of the world? The ready answer to which inquiry is, that we must consult our own hearts, and examine what passes in them, in order to form a right judgment on the

motives of our own actions. But if we consider what is meant by searching the heart, we shall find that to search the heart, and to examine into the motives and principles of our actions, is one and the same thing; and therefore this direction does not set us one step forward in the inquiry. Besides, it is no easy matter to come to the knowlege of our own hearts, since from experience it is plain that men do impose on themselves at least as often as they do on the world; and find an ease and satisfaction in doing the things which shall yield no fruit in the great day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed. And though in actions which require deliberation, and are not undertaken without a previous debate had with ourselves on their expediency or inexpediency, an honest man may judge of his own motives and sincerity; yet a thousand things there are which men do habitually, and with so much ease and readiness, as not to attend to the influence of any particular motive at the time of doing the action. Charitable persons do not, in each single instance of charity, set before their minds the connexion of that action with the honor of God and the good of the world; nor can they perhaps be able to say what particular motive led to each act of charity. A man of a regular chastity and sobriety does not every day, nor perhaps every month, reason himself into the observation of these duties, and exert the motives in his heart, on which the practice of these duties is founded; nor can he answer, should he be examined to the point, how far his virtue is owing to this or the other motive, or how far to his natural temperament and constitution. And since no one virtue consists in a single act, or in any certain determinate number of single acts, but in a regular and habitual conformity to the rules of reason and morality; which conformity the more habitual it is, the less we feel of the influence of any particular motives; it is hardly possible for men to estimate the good or evil of their actions, by considering the immediate and sensible connexion between each action, and the motives producing it. For, as many motions of the body, which depend on the acts of our will, are exerted with the greatest reason, and yet the reason of exerting them is but seldom by any, and by some hardly ever attended to; so in moral actions a man of confirmed habitual goodness does many

things right, without recurring back by reflexion to the special grounds and reasons of duty, in which the morality of such actions is founded.

For these reasons, and for others which might be assigned, it seems to me to be a very distracting method, to put people on inquiry into the motives of all their particular actions; and still more unreasonable it seems to be, to exclude sincerity from all actions that are not immediately influenced by a special consideration of the proper motives of religion; because in this case, the more naturally and habitually men do good, the more reason they will have to doubt of their sincerity.

We must therefore search after a more equitable and more practicable way of judging of our sincerity. Our Saviour tells us, we must 'love our neighbor as ourselves;' making hereby that love, which naturally every man bears to himself, to be the standard of that love and charity which we ought to have to one another. As therefore it is sufficient to love our neighbor as ourselves; so likewise it will be sufficient evidence of the sincerity of our charity, if we can give as good proof of our love towards our neighbor, as we ordinarily can do of our love towards ourselves.

Now certain it is, that the principle of self-preservation does generally act so uniformly in men, that they do the things most necessary to their own well-being without much thought and reflexion on the reasons for so doing; nor do we ever suspect men so far in the sincerity of their love to themselves, as to question whether the things which they do rightly for their own preservation, proceed from proper motives, and out of a due regard to their own well-being.

What the principle of self-preservation is with respect to ourselves, the same is charity with respect to our neighbor: and the more real and vigorous this principle is, the more easily, and with the less deliberation, does it exert the acts of love and beneficence towards our fellow-creatures. Hypocrites and dissemblers, and self-interested persons, have always a design in what they do; and therefore they necessarily deliberate whether it be worth their while to do good to others or no; and can therefore assign to themselves a particular reason for any good office they perform to their neighbor: and it is a great pre-

sumption that a man acts on a general principle of charity and humanity, when he lives well towards others, without having a particular reason to assign in every instance for so doing.

It is either a principle of self-love, or a principle of charity, that inclines us to do good to others. Where men act out of self-love, and seek to promote their own interest, to gratify their own vanity or ambition by serving others, there is so much design in what they do, that they cannot but be conscious of the reasons which prevail with them: and where there are no such reasons to be assigned, what cause is there for men to suspect their own sincerity, or to imagine that the love they show to others proceeds from any thing but a good principle?

It is therefore, if not a certain rule, yet at least a very reasonable presumption, that we act on a true principle of charity, when we seek the ease, and satisfaction, and comfort of others, without being conscious to ourselves of any selfish views to our own interest in what we do.

But to prevent mistakes, I would not be understood, by laying down this rule, to condemn men always in the good they do to others with a view to themselves: for surely it is as reasonable to exchange good offices, as other less valuable conveniences of life; and indeed the happiness of civil life consists in this mutual exchange of good offices: and therefore, where men serve others in an honest way, expecting only honest returns, this justice must at least be done them, to own that they are fair traders, and deal in a good commodity. The Apostle to the Hebrews exhorts us 'to provoke one another to love and to good works;' and the best way to provoke others to love, is to show love towards them.

But the surest way to know whether we are influenced as we ought to be by a principle of charity, is to consider not this or that particular action, for very bad men may sometimes do very good things; nor yet to consider our behavior with respect to particular persons, for the worst of men are capable of strong passions of love for particular relations and acquaintance; but to reflect on our carriage towards all in general, and in all instances: for if the principle of charity be in us, it will discover itself in a uniformity of all our actions; as the principle of self-preservation makes men seek their own good, not at one time

more than another, or in one instance more than another, but at all times and in all instances equally.

If therefore we find that our sentiments of tenderness and humanity are confined to certain persons, to our relations or particular friends, to the men of our own sect or party: we may be sure that such sentiments are the product of some partial and narrow views, and not the genuine offspring of true charity, which is in its nature extensive and universal, and reaches as far, nay much beyond the power we have of doing good: or if we find that in some instances we are apt enough to deal justly and mercifully with our neighbors, but that in others we are regardless of mercy and justice, and value not the credit, or reputation, or contentment of our brethren, but are ready to sacrifice them all to our own passions and corrupt inclinations; our being vile in some instances is a certain indication that our being good in others is not owing to a principle of charity, but to something else, which we may call by any other name rather than virtue. If you love not the world, and the good things of it, so much as to injure your neighbor for the sake of making a gain to yourself, it is well. If you can part with your own for the relief of the necessities of such as are indigent, it is better. If, besides this, you have a friendly temper and disposition, and love to see all about you easy and happy, it is a great step towards being perfect. But still if lust prevails, and leads you to violate the wife or the daughter of your friend, how dwells the love of God or of your neighbor in you? For charity is 'the fulfilling of the law: for this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'

The rule which I am endeavoring to establish, in order to enable men to judge of the principle on which they act towards others, is the very same which the Apostle to the Corinthians has in effect described in the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle; where, speaking of spiritual gifts, and showing that without charity they are of no use to the possessors thereof, his subject led him to give the certain marks and characters of that charity which he so highly exalted. What then is it? Is

it almsgiving? No, says the Apostle; 'Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.' Charity is not a particular virtue, nor is it confined to any kind of good works, but it is a general spirit of life influencing all the actions of a man; it is the very soul of virtue, and shows itself in the functions of it: 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind,—envieth not,—vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.'

Thus, you see, the Scripture rule of judging ourselves in this great point of charity, is to compare our conduct with the precept, and to consider whether our actions are uniformly suited to the principle we pretend to act by. We are not directed to consider only particular actions, or the immediate motives which induced us to do this or that particular good office; from whence we can argue but with little certainty, and little comfort to ourselves: for a general principle is discoverable only by a general and uniform influence over all our actions. Men may be good by starts; may be tender and compassionate more at one time than another, according as their minds are softened by accidental misfortunes happening to themselves: but charity moves in a higher sphere, and views all the creatures of God with a constant benevolence: it is, as the text calls it, ἀγάπη ἐκτενὴς, 'an uninterrupted love,' and which exerts itself uniformly in all our actions.

When we find this constant benevolence in our minds, and that we act conformably to it within the rules of reason, why should we doubt of our own sincerity, or scrupulously examine into the special motives which attended on every act of charity? for, where we are conscious of no ill designs, no private self-interest, and yet find that what we do is agreeable to truth and equity, why should we doubt that we do amiss? It is therefore an unreasonable burden to put men on this sort of self-examination; and more unreasonable to suggest to them, that the good they do is of no value unless in every instance it be extorted from them by an anxious consideration of the special

motives of religion. You may as well tell a man that he means not his own nourishment in what he eats and drinks, unless he has before his mind an aphorism of Hippocrates to justify every bit he puts into his mouth: for, as the principle of self-preservation directs us without much reflexion, and often without any, to seek our own good; so a general principle of charity will make it, as it were, natural to us to seek the good of others, without the trouble of choice and deliberation.

To conclude: you see the extensive nature of charity; and you see a plain and natural way of judging whether this excellent gift works in you or no. If you allow yourself in any instance to injure or oppress your neighbor, how can you be said to love him? since all ways of injustice and oppression are equally inconsistent with charity. Whatever therefore is the darling passion, which makes you transgress against your brother, that, that is the thing which destroys in you this most excellent grace of the gospel. What have you then to do, but to root out this evil from your heart; to expel this weed, which overruns the ground, and chokes the good seed? Here therefore let us point all our examination to discover wherein we offend; let us trust the good we do to shift for itself, without being anxious to pry into the causes and motives leading to it: but let us double our care to seek out our failings, and to correct them; that our love may be without stain, and deserve the name of that charity, 'which shall cover the multitude of sins.'

DISCOURSE XXXVIII.

PART II.

It remains now that we consider in what sense the Apostle's assertion is to be understood, 'that charity shall cover the multitude of sins.'

To 'cover sins' signifies to excuse them, to exempt them

from wrath and punishment: in any other sense it is impossible for sins to be covered in the sight of God, who cannot be deceived or imposed on, or so over-delighted with the good we do, as not to see and note our evil actions.

With respect to the judgment of men, this expression will bear a stronger exposition: for whether we consider the charitable person judging of other men's sins, it may very well be, that his charity may incline him to think much better of sinners than they deserve; or whether we consider others' judging of the charitable person's offences, it is natural enough for men to be charmed with the goodness and excellency of charity, and not to see, or not to attend to the defects which appear in so good company.

Which of these two expositions ought to prevail, depends on a farther inquiry; namely, whether the Apostle in his assertion that 'charity shall cover the multitude of sins,' had respect to the judgment of God or the judgment of men.

Nor is this the only inquiry necessary in order to fix the determinate meaning of the text: for we must consider also of whose sins the Apostle speaks; and whether he means to affirm that charity shall cover the charitable person's offences, or the offences of other people.

There are probable reasons to be given for the support of each of these interpretations: and it will be proper to examine these reasons, and to consider how far each interpretation may be admitted within the limits of reason and Scripture.

First, there are good reasons to be assigned for limiting the Apostle's assertion concerning charity to the judgment of men. Hatred, says the wise King of Israel, 'stirreth up strifes, but love covereth all sins:' where 'covering of sins' being opposed to 'stirring up strifes,' the meaning needs must be, that as hatred perpetually begets complaints, animosities, and resentments, so love allays these intemperate heats, and disposes to peace and friendship, and inclines men to overlook and to forgive the offences of each other. In this place therefore it is evident that love is said 'to cover all sins' with regard to the judgment that men make of each other's offences. And the expression in St. Peter is so much the same with this in Solomon, that it is very probable the Apostle borrowed it from

hence, and applied the saying of the wise King in support of his general precept, 'Have fervent charity among yourselves.'

In this view then the Apostle recommends mutual charity, as the only thing that can render life comfortable and supportable to us, and deliver us from perpetual vexations, and put the mind in a proper posture to consider and prepare for the great change at hand: for thus his reasoning stands, 'The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer; and above all things have fervent charity among yourselves.' A man drunk with passion, and engaged in perpetual strifes, is no more capable of making a due preparation for the great change which is near, than one intoxicated with wine.

Temperance and charity are the properest state we can put ourselves into to wait for the coming of our Lord. And the Apostle had learned to subjoin this advice to the mention of the great day from his blessed Master, who had denounced judgment without mercy to all such as should be found, at his second coming, void of charity and sobriety: 'But and if that servant say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and be drunken; the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.' In conformity to this declaration of our blessed Lord, the Apostle having given warning of the end of all things being at hand in the verse before the text, immediately exhorts to sobriety, prayer, and charity, that we may not be found in the number of those who are beating their fellow-servants, or abusing the gifts of God to luxury and intemperance.

Charity, therefore, as it naturally inclines us to overlook and to forgive the offences of our brethren, so it puts us into that state of peace and serenity of mind, which is necessary to enable us to prepare for the reception of our great Judge.

In this sense of the words St. Peter's assertion agrees exactly with the accounts given us of charity in other places of holy Scripture. St. Paul is very particular in describing the properties of charity; and tells us that it 'suffereth long, and

is kind, and is not easily provoked;' but 'beareth all things, endureth all things.' What is it now that charity suffereth, beareth, and endureth? Not its own offences surely, but the offences and provocations of others. Men who are void of charity can be kind enough to themselves, and are apt to bear but too long with their own offences: but this is not the praise of charity to overlook its own faults; but it is its glory to bear with the faults of others, and to suffer much, and yet not be much provoked. And what is this but, in the expression of Solomon and St. Peter, to 'cover a multitude of sins;' to draw a curtain over the infirmities of our brethren, and to spread our own richest garment over the nakedness of our friends?

Besides, the expression here made use of by St. Peter, 'The multitude of sins,' leads to this interpretation. When our Saviour exhorted his disciples to forgive men their trespasses, St. Peter put the question to him, 'Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?' Our Lord answered, 'I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.' From which answer St. Peter could not but learn that it was the property of charity to 'cover the multitude' of our brother's sins; to forgive him, not only when he offended against us seven times, but even when he transgressed seventy times seven: a large number; and the larger, because it is not set down to mark the precise number of offences which charity may forgive, but rather to denote that there is no number which charity ought not to forgive.

Moreover, it is much more reasonable to think that a truly charitable man should meet with a multitude of sins in other people for the exercise of his charity, than that he should have a multitude of his own to cover. We meet with no such description of charity in holy writ as may lead us to imagine that it is consistent with a multitude of sins. Charity is the 'fulfilling of the law,' as the Apostle to the Romans informs us; and it proceeds, as he farther acquaints us in his Epistle to Timothy, 'out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.' Now, how can the multitude of sins, spoken of in the text, be consistent with fulfilling the law? How can it be supposed to dwell in a pure heart? to be joined with a good conscience? and to have fellowship with faith unfeigned? We

may ask the same questions here, which the Apostle to the Corinthians does in another case: 'What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?' So that, considering how inconsistent these things are, the hopes which men conceive of compounding their sins by the means of charity, are in great danger of being overthrown by this conclusion, that where there is charity, there will not be a multitude of sins; and where there is a multitude of sins, there can hardly be true charity to hide them.

If you think that the text, according to this interpretation, holds forth no great comfort or encouragement to charity, since the benefit accrues to others, whose offences are covered by charity, and not to the charitable person, who grows rather indolent than happy through an excess of goodness; it must, on the other side, be considered, how blessed a state it is to enjoy a calm, whilst the world around us is sailing in a storm; to sit free from the torments of anger and revenge, whilst others burn with resentment and indignation; to have the mind at liberty to look into itself, and to look up with pleasure to its great Creator, whilst others sacrifice both their reason and their religion to the transports of passion. It is this happy temper alone that can bring us to expect our great change with any satisfaction. How happy a condition will it be to be found at peace with ourselves and the world, when our great Master summons us to appear! And who would not dread to be called from quarrels, contentions, and strife, to stand before the judgment-seat of God?

Secondly, there may be reasons for expounding the text of the judgment of God, and yet the Apostle's assertion may still relate to the sins of others, and not to the sins of the charitable person. But what, you will say, may one man's sins be covered in the sight of God by another man's charity? Yes, they may; and in this sense the very expression of the text is made use of by St. James: 'Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.'

Where it is evident that the sins to be covered are the sins of the soul to be saved from death; that is, the sins of the person converted from the error of his ways and not the sins of the converter: and the doing so great a good to a brother, as the saving his soul and hiding the multitude of his sins, is proposed as an incitement to every charitable person to labor the conversion of a sinner. Join other cases: it is very plain how much sin and folly proceed from the mutual passions of men laboring despitefully to vex and provoke each other; and how much might be prevented on both sides, had one of them only reason and discretion enough to put an end to strife. This part the charitable man is ever ready to act; and when he does, his passionate adversary owes it to his goodness, that in his anger he did not sin against God. This the Prophet David saw and acknowleged in his own case, and blessed the happy instrument which prevented his hands from shedding blood. He had sworn in his wrath to destroy Nabal, and all his family with him; but the wife of Nabal with gentle intreaties put a stop to his revenge, and saved him from committing the great crime. David no sooner recovered himself from his passion but he saw how much he was indebted to his petitioner; and cried out, 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me; and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.' This speech every passionate man may have reason to make to his charitable neighbor, who gives way to his wrath, and by gentle and kind treatment saves him from the extravagances which a warm opposition would hurry him into. And is it not a great encouragement to put on meekness and charity, since by bearing with the light offences of our brethren against ourselves we may possibly save them from much greater offences against God, and be instrumental in delivering them from that judgment, which, by their own bitterness of spirit and thirst after revenge, they would certainly draw on themselves?

Were we to go through the several works of charity, and consider it instructing the ignorant, encouraging the weak, rebuking the presumptuous, in a word, giving an helping hand

to every good work; it would appear, in many instances, how instrumental charity is in covering the sins of others. But I hasten to the

Third and last inquiry, what encouragement we have from reason and Scripture to expect that by charity we may cover our own sins.

In the verse before the text the Apostle gives us this warning—'The end of all things is at hand.' To this solemn notice he subjoins a proper exhortation; 'Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer; and above all things have fervent charity among yourselves.' The reason of the latter part of this exhortation he gives in the words now under our consideration, 'For charity shall cover the multitude of sins.' These things laid together create a presumption that the Apostle might mean to instruct each man how to cover his own sins, and to prevent the ill effects naturally to be feared from them, when the end of all things should come. When we think of judgment, of whose sins do we think, or for whose offences do we tremble, but our own? When the preachers of the gospel warn us of the great day of the Lord, it is a strong call to repentance, and for whose sins but our own? Since therefore the Apostle calls on us to use the best means to cover the multitude of sins, in expectation of the great change that is at hand, whose sins can we more naturally think on than our own? And if this be indeed the case, then is charity recommended to us as a proper means to cover or excuse our own sins in the sight of God.

Besides, the exhortation to mutual charity being subjoined immediately to the mention of prayer, may be a farther argument of St. Peter's intention to instruct us how to hide our own offences. He well knew on what condition our Lord had taught us to ask forgiveness of our sins; 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.' This being the condition on which the pardon of God is promised, what have we to cover our sins in the sight of God without charity? that charity which 'beareth all things, endureth all things,' which hideth the trespasses of our brother from our eyes, and for that reason will cover our own offences, when the Lord shall come to judge the earth.

But farther: the nature and extent of charity considered, there arises a farther argument to confirm the charitable man in the hopes of pardon for his own transgressions: for charity is the 'fulfilling of the law;' it is the 'royal law,' as St. James calls it, which 'whosoever fulfils shall do well.' And in this view, St. Peter's advice, to 'have fervent charity, that it may cover the multitude of sins,' is equivalent to Daniel's advice to Nebuchadnezzar: 'O King, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor.' Charity is indeed the 'breaking off of sin;' it is 'righteousness' and 'mercy;' it is the essential part of that repentance to which the promises of life are made in the gospel.

For these reasons it may be allowed that the Apostle meant to exhort us to charity, as a proper means to obtain forgiveness of our sins at the hands of God. But to prevent mistakes in so momentous a concern to ourselves, I beg leave to lay a few observations before you, which may help to set this matter in a clear light.

First, we must not so expound this text, as to make it contradict the general terms of pardon and reconciliation proposed in the gospel of our Saviour: and therefore, since the gospel allows no license for continuing in sin, nor gives any encouragement to hope for the pardon of sin, but on repentance and amendment of life, we do but deceive ourselves when we give way to other hopes, and by the help of a strong imagination, wrest the words of St. Peter, and other like passages of Scripture, to the service of our inclinations. You have seen that the words of the text are capable of divers interpretations, and therefore they cannot be so strong in any one sense as to control the meaning of more plain and express declarations of holy writ: nor can we reasonably imagine that the holy writers forgot or neglected to acquaint us with our best advantage, and left it to a single expression in an epistle of St. Peter, to inform us of something more comfortable and beneficial to us, than the general terms, as proposed in the gospel, do contain.

Secondly, we must not so expound this, or any other passage of Scripture, as to raise up a doctrine contumelious and reproachful to God, or inconsistent with his attributes of holiness

and justice. Now there is nothing more reproachful to God, than to deal with him as if you could purchase a pardon or an indulgence at his hands, as if you could compound sins with him, and bargain for so many acts of charity in lieu of so many acts of extortion and oppression, which you have been, or do intend to be, engaged in. Consider, with the Almighty dwelleth truth and justice, and in the court of heaven there is no commutation for iniquity; no excuse for it, but forsaking it; no pardon for it, but by renouncing it. 'Go, and sin no more,' says our Saviour to the woman taken in adultery. You see here the condition of pardon for sin; so essential a condition, that no indulgence, no charter can be good, that wants this clause.

Under these limitations then, let us consider how far we may apply this sovereign remedy of charity to our own sins.

We may consider our sins as past, present, and to come. With respect to our past sins, it is out of our power to recall them: with respect to our present, it is in our power to forsake them: with respect to those to come, it is in our power to prevent or avoid them. To begin with the last: no sort or degree of charity can so far vacate the duties of virtue and religion, as to make it unnecessary for us to avoid the occasions of sin for the time to come. To reform mankind is the end of the gospel; and it is the constant call of God to us, speaking by the voice of nature and revelation, 'that denying all ungodliness, we should live righteously and soberly in this present world.' It is absurd therefore to suppose that either nature or revelation can dissolve our obedience to God, or show us a way how we may safely give scope to sin, and promise ourselves the pleasures of iniquity with security. Nay, charity itself, could it possibly entertain so malicious a thought against God, as to lay up for itself an opportunity of sinning against God with impunity, would cease to be charity; and our very remedy, so applied, would turn to poison in our hands.

Secondly, as to our present sins: as it is in our power, so it will ever be our duty, to forsake them; and nothing can dispense with this obligation. We must not therefore pretend to balance our good and evil together, and fondly imagine that our virtues do so far exceed our iniquities, that we may safely

enjoy them. Our Saviour tells us, 'that when we have done our utmost, we must say that we are unprofitable servants.' Where then is our claim to so much merit and righteousness, as may render it proper for us to do less than our utmost, and may intitle us to the reward of the servants of God, whilst we wilfully continue the servants of sin? Such a pretence once allowed would render repentance unnecessary, would vacate the terms of the gospel, and by setting up one new remedy for sin, would render ineffectual all that ever nature or revelation prescribed.

Thirdly, as to our past sins: it is not in our power to recall them. Here therefore the goodness of God has provided a remedy, that we may not perish everlastingly. This then is the only case in which we have any encouragement to seek for a cover for our sins. If we are indeed sincere in desiring to serve God and save ourselves, we may forsake our present iniquities, and avoid them for the future; and therefore to propose after-remedies would be to encourage sin: but, for our past offences, we cannot recall them; here therefore a remedy is necessary, and here the goodness of God has provided one. Repentance and amendment of life is the remedy provided; and since charity is the perfection of the law, to forsake sin, and to live by the rules of charity, is the surest, the most effectual way to obtain pardon. Under these restraints let not the sinner be discouraged in his hopes, that 'charity shall cover the multitude of sins;' for his hope shall be confirmed to him by him who is true and faithful, and cannot deceive.

But even in this case there is need to guard against mistakes: for though returning to our duty and the works of charity is the best amends we can make for the guilt of past offences; yet charity will not be accepted of God in lieu of justice. If we have injured and defrauded our neighbour, our debt to him will not be paid by charity to another. An hundred pounds given to the poor will not atone for a thousand, nor even for an hundred, gained by extortion or oppression. We must do justice before we pretend to be charitable, even in this sense, and refund our wicked and ungodly gains, before any part of our wealth can be made an acceptable sacrifice to God. It is too common for men to compound such debts as these, and to

imagine they sanctify their extortion by laying out part of it for the glory of God, as they love to speak: but it is the highest insolence and affront to God to think to bribe his justice, and to obtain his pardon, by such a piece of corruption as any human court would condemn. Go to any court of justice, tell them that you have by fraud and extortion got a thousand pounds from one man, but you are willing to give an hundred to another who is in great want: what would they say to you? Would they not tell you that your charity was hypocrisy, a pretence to cover iniquity? And shall not God judge righteously, who knows your fraud, whether you will own it or not?

In a word: charity will not atone for want of justice. 'Owe no many any thing,' says the Apostle, 'but to love one another.' First pay the debts of justice, and then think of charity; at least, till the debts of justice are discharged, do not imagine that your 'charity will cover the multitude of sins.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXXIX.

GALATIANS, CHAP. VI.—VERSE 9.

THIS and other like passages in Scripture are founded in the known truth, that God does not ordinarily dispense the rewards and punishments due to virtue and vice in this life, but refers the right settlement of all accounts to a future state. It may be thought that it would have been better if this retribution had taken place here below; but a little attention will show us the wisdom of Providence. Were men to receive the rewards due to their good actions in this world, there would be no reason why they should grow *weary in well doing*, which would so abundantly repay all their pains and trouble.

It is natural for men, when they see flagrant instances of wickedness, to make secret demands in their own hearts for justice against them; and if these are not answered, they are apt to conclude that they themselves have *cleansed their hearts in vain*. Whenever hopes and expectations are raised beyond all probability of being answered by the event, they can produce nothing but anger against the ordinary course of things: yet who is to blame? Not he who appointed this course, but he who so little understood it, as to expect what it never was intended to produce. Who would pity the husbandman who lamented that he could not reap in spring, when the harvest comes only in the summer? and the case is the same in all other instances. It is of great consequence therefore to balance rightly our expectations, and adjust them to the natural course of things ordained by Providence. If we grow faint in our

work, because our untimely wishes are disappointed, we shall forfeit the reward of patient endurance: and this seems to be the foundation of the Apostle's exhortation in the text.

It is no uncommon thing to press men to a virtuous behavior by a prospect of the rewards which such a behavior is intitled to in this world; which is justified both by experience and Scripture; inasmuch as peace and tranquillity of mind are the great ingredients of human happiness. But this argument is so little concerned with the external good and evil of the world, that it is applicable to men of all fortunes and conditions. But if men, when they hear of a happiness due to virtue in this life, will conceive hopes of obtaining honors and riches from God in recompense for their obedience, they expect what was never yet generally answered, and probably never will be; and thus, while they pursue the shadow, they are in danger of losing the substance.

To clear up this point, it is necessary to inquire what reason or authority we have to assert the interposition of Providence in the private affairs of men, with respect to the rewards of virtue and vice.

If we view and consider well the frame of the world and its laws, we can no more doubt the fact of its being sustained than of its being created by the Almighty. But the question now is, since God has made man a reasonable creature, and endowed him with a liberty of acting, how far it has been thought fit to leave him to his liberty and the consequences of his own acts. To come at any knowlege in this case, there are but three ways: to consider what reason requires, what experience teaches, what Scripture confirms.

First, with respect to what reason requires. It has pleased God to endow us with a power of judging and a liberty of acting. Why were these powers given? Was it that we might use them, and thus give proof of virtue or vice? or was it that God might overrule them, and render them in every

particular case useless and insignificant? In this case he had better have made us mere machines, than free agents at first, and then machines by an arbitrary interposition of power. To secure the happiness of a good man, and the punishment of a bad one in this world, the actions of all men must be determined; they must be compelled to contribute to the happiness of the one and the misery of the other: and there would be an end of freedom.

This consideration leads to another of still greater weight: for if the freedom of human actions cannot be maintained on this supposition, neither can the distinction of virtue and vice: for there is no morality nor immorality where there is no choice or freedom, and consequently no responsibility.

But taking the case in another point of view, if virtue were to be constantly attended with success in worldly affairs, and vice certainly pursued with misery, there would be no trial of faith and obedience, which is necessary to prepare us for the blessings of another life: virtue would not be what it now is; but rather a kind of sensual thing, arising often from ambition, avarice, and a love of worldly enjoyments: this point enlarged on. But we may go still farther, and say that the condition of good men would be rendered worse than it really is, in losing one great support of their hopes and expectations in another world; in being presented with a vain scene of worldly pleasure, instead of that weight of glory which they on sure grounds expect.

These reasons may induce us to think that it is consonant to the wisdom and goodness of God to allow men to use the liberty which he has given them. But they ought not to be carried so far as to exclude his providence from the care and government of the moral part of the world. It is one thing to turn a state of trial and probation into a state of rewards and punishments, by dispensing good and evil to every man according to his work; and another to exercise acts of government suitable

to the state, and subservient to the ends of creation: this point enlarged on.

In the second place, experience in this case is considered. That worldly good and evil are not dispensed in proportion to the merits of men, appears indisputable: indeed the world has never been without complaints on this head. The righteous in all times have lamented their lot, and the wicked, seeing their own prosperity, have grown hardened and secure in their iniquity. To abate these presumptions on the one hand, and clamors on the other, has found work for the wise and good of all ages; but the truth of the case has never been disputed: and this may be safely left to every man's own judgment.

Lastly, it is inquired how far this experience is confirmed by what the Scripture teaches us to expect.

There are some passages of holy writ, which at first sight seem to promise more to the righteous in this life, than we have been able to find either reason or experience to justify. The Psalmist declares; *I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread.* But his son Solomon saw a different scene; *just men, unto whom it happened according to the work of the wicked; and wicked men, to whom it happened according to the work of the righteous:* so also it occurred in the days of our Saviour and his Apostles. But this passage in the Psalms relates not to our present purpose: it describes a general case of Providence over good men, in providing for them the necessaries of life, whilst they endeavor to serve God; but of a just reward for them in this world it says nothing: in that case we might expect to hear of crowns and sceptres given to them. As to this providential care of the righteous, our Saviour has given us great reason to expect it. *Seek ye first,* says he, *the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;* and on his authority St. Paul tells us, that *godliness hath the promise of the life that now is,* &c.

Nay, farther, there is great reason to think that God often blesses the honest endeavors of the virtuous in this world: but then there is no appearance that the rules of justice are at all concerned in such dispensations; for the righteous often suffer; nay, under the gospel they are called to suffer: but on the point of rewards and punishments the parable of the tares in Mat. xiii. is decisive; the meaning of which our Saviour himself has expounded.

Thus reason, experience, and Scripture, all combine in teaching us not to look for the reward of our labors in this world, but to wait with patience for God's appointed time, when he will do righteously, and recompense to every man the things that he hath done. Concluding exhortation.

DISCOURSE XXXIX.

GALATIANS, CHAP. VI.—VERSE 9.

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

The text, and other like passages of Scripture, are founded in this known truth, that God does not ordinarily dispense the rewards and punishments due to virtue and vice in this life; but that he has appointed another time and place, how far distant we know not, in which all accounts shall be set right, and every man receive according to his works. What force the objects of sense have on the minds of men, how far they outweigh the distant hopes of religion, is matter of daily experience. The world pays presently; but the language of religion is, 'we shall reap, if we faint not.' It may be thought perhaps, that it would have been better for the cause of religion, if the rewards of it had been immediate, and more nearly related to our senses; and the case being otherwise, proves in fact a great prejudice to virtue. But if we can take leave of our imaginations a little, and attend to reason, we shall see that this dispensation of Providence was ordained in wisdom. Were the case otherwise; were men to receive a due recompense of reward in this world for the good they do, there would be no reason why they should grow 'weary in well doing,' no cause for their fainting under the work, which would so abundantly and immediately repay all their labor and pains.

It is natural for men, when they have before their eyes flagrant instances of wickedness and impiety, to make a secret demand on God in their own hearts for justice against such notorious offenders. If their demands are not answered, (and they rarely are,) but the wicked continue to flourish, and the

good to suffer under their oppression; they, rightly judging that they were mistaken in their expectations, and not rightly judging where to charge the mistake, are apt to conclude that they have 'cleansed their hearts in vain,' and in vain have they 'washed their hands in innocency.'

Whenever the hopes and expectations are raised beyond all probability of being answered in the event, they can yield nothing but uneasiness, anger, and indignation against the course of things in the world: and yet who is to blame? Not he that appointed this natural order, but he who understood it so little, as to expect from it what it was never intended to produce. Would you pity the husbandman, should you see him lamenting his misfortune, because he could not reap in spring, when all the world knows the time of harvest is not till summer? The case is the same in all other instances: if men anticipate the reward of their labor by the eagerness and impatience of their hopes, they will be disappointed indeed; but not because their labor is in vain, which in due time will bring its reward, but because their expectations are vain and unreasonable, and outrun the order of nature, which cannot be transgressed.

You see then of what consequence it is to us rightly to balance our expectations, and to adjust them to that natural course and order of things which Providence has established in the world. We may easily lose the fruit of our well-grounded hopes, by giving ourselves up to the delusion of false ones. If we grow sick of our work because our untimely wishes are disappointed, we shall forfeit the reward which patient continuance in well-doing would, in the natural course of things, bring with it. And this I take to be the foundation and ground of the Apostle's exhortation in the text, 'Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.'

It is no uncommon thing, I know, to press men to a virtuous behavior, in prospect of the rewards which such a behavior is intitled to in this world; and there is, as well experience as Scripture, to justify the so doing: for if peace and tranquillity of mind here, and hopes full of comfort with respect to hereafter, are ingredients in human happiness; and surely they are the greatest! these are to be had, and only to be had, from a

conscience void of offence towards God and towards man. But this argument is so little concerned with the external good and evil of the world, that it is applicable to men of all fortunes and conditions. Thus we preach to the prince, and thus we preach to the meanest of his subjects: one cannot enjoy his greatness, nor the other bear his distress, without those supports which innocence and virtue can only administer. The pleasures of life are a joyless fruition to a mind sick of guilt; and the evils of it are too sharp to be endured by a wounded spirit.

Thus far we tread safely in promising a present reward to virtue; we exceed not the order appointed by God, who, if he has given us some desires, which, in our present state of degeneracy, often prove temptations to iniquity, has given us also so much reason and understanding, that we cannot be wicked and happy in ourselves at the same time: how much farther than this we may go, shall presently be considered. But if men, when they hear of an happiness due as the reward of virtue in this life, will conceive hopes of obtaining honor, power, and riches from God in recompense of their obedience, they raise an expectation which was never yet generally answered, and, I suppose, for very good reasons, never will; and whilst they pursue this shadow, they are in great danger of losing the substance, the real reward of obedience, which shall one day be bestowed on all who can be contented to wait for glory and immortality.

To clear this point will be well worth your attention. In order to it we must inquire what reason or authority we have to assert the interposition of Providence in the private affairs of men, with a view of proportioning to their virtue and vice proper rewards and punishments.

If we view the whole frame of the world, and consider the great laws of nature by which it is, and has for ages past been, preserved in order and beauty, we can no more question its being sustained by a constant and immediate influence of God's providence, than we can of its being at first brought into order by him. If we consider ourselves, and how we live, move, and have our being, it is evident that we are upheld every moment by the hand of God. I speak, and would be understood to mean, literally. If there be any thing in the compass of our

knowlege certain, it is this, that we owe our life to that power by the influence of which the functions of life are performed: search diligently for this power, and you will not fail of finding God. If any man be otherwise minded, let him account for the first principle of motion in animal bodies, and he shall have leave to doubt of all the rest. But this is not our point; the question now is, since God has made man a reasonable creature, and endowed him with a liberty of acting, how far he has thought fit to leave him to his liberty, and to give him up here to the issues and consequences of his own doings? Of his power we doubt not; we know he can overrule every action of man, and every thought of his heart: our search is not what he can do, but what he has been pleased to do, and what method he has prescribed to himself, with respect to the actions of men, and the consequences which flow from them in this life. To come at any knowlege in this case there are but these three ways: to consider what reason requires, what experience teaches, what Scripture confirms.

Let us consider what reason requires. It has pleased God to make us reasonable creatures, that is, to endow us with a power of judging and a liberty of acting. Why were these powers given? Was it that we might use and exercise them, and give proof of our virtue or vice in so doing? Or was it that God might overrule them, and render them in every particular instance useless and insignificant? If this is the case, had he not much better have made us machines at first, than have created us free agents, and then make us machines by an arbitrary interposition of power? Who can account for the wisdom of God in making so great a thing to no use or purpose: in filling this lower world with free agents, and then excluding all freedom by immediate acts of his power? Now this would in great measure be the case were rewards and punishments to be punctually administered in this world; and that for this plain reason: the temporal prosperity of men depends on their own actions, and the natural consequences of them, and on the actions and natural consequences of the actions of others with whom they live in society. Now to secure the happiness of a man, not only his own actions, but the actions of all others with whom he is any way concerned, must be determined, so as to

conspire in making him prosperous; that is, he and all about him must lose the freedom of acting in order to secure his welfare here. If a righteous man must never suffer in this world, all the wicked about him must be restrained from doing him violence. If a wicked man must be punished according to his merit, all who would do him more harm than he deserves to suffer, must be withheld; and if none designed him harm enough, somebody must be employed to do the work. Carry this reflexion abroad into the world, where the fortunes and interests of men are mixed and complicated so variously together, that one man's temporal prosperity depends on the actions of many besides himself, and it will be very clear that there must be an end of all freedom, on supposition that rewards and punishments are to be equally dispensed in this world.

This consideration leads to another of still greater weight: for if the freedom of human actions cannot be maintained on this supposition, neither can the distinction of virtue and vice. There is no morality or immorality where there is no choice or freedom: consequently were the actions of men under an absolute control, they would no more be answerable for their doings, than a clock is for its motions: and therefore to call on God to make all things work by immediate interposition of his power, for the present reward of virtue and punishment of vice, is a request not consistent with itself; it is desiring God to do that for the sake of virtue, which would destroy virtue, and leave no room for the exercise of it, no ground on which to distinguish it from vice and iniquity.

But to leave these considerations, let us observe farther, that was virtue to be constantly attended with success in worldly affairs, and vice certainly pursued with misery, there would be no room for that trial of our faith and obedience, which is requisite to prepare us for the greater blessings of another life. On this supposition, virtue would not be what it now is; it would be a kind of sensual thing, arising often from ambition, avarice, and an inordinate love of worldly enjoyments: reason and judgment, the love of God, and a just sense of our duty to him, would have little efficacy in the business. Now, since God has placed us here in order to our fitting ourselves for a better world, and has ordained this world for a state of trial

only, it is absurd to expect from his wisdom and justice such a procedure, as would contradict this great and main end of our creation. The pleasures and afflictions of life are ordained for trials of virtue; and, according to the visible course of Providence, they really are so: but if you introduce a new order, and, by another dispensation of good and evil in this life, convert these trials into rewards and punishments, you invert the order of Providence; this life will no longer be a state of trial, nor the next a state of rewards and punishments; for all future expectations would be in great measure superseded by the immediate recompense bestowed in this life.

On this consideration we may go farther, and say that the condition of good men would be really worse than it is, were this world a place of rewards and punishments for virtue and vice. Were this to be the only place of rewards and punishments, the assertion would be too evident to be denied by any but such mean wretched spirits as would be content to give up their hopes of immortality for the present enjoyment of the world. But take the case as it now stands with us, supposing only this alteration, that virtue and vice received their due portions of good and evil here, would not good men be sufferers by losing one great support of their hopes and expectations in another world? The notions we have of good and evil, the conceptions we form of God by the exercise of reason, joined to the experience we have of the unequal distribution of good and evil in this life, conspire to prove to us that there is another and better state, in which the sufferings of the righteous shall be fully compensated. Now break this chain of reasoning, by introducing rewards and punishments into this life, and you deface the great hopes of the righteous, and present him with an empty scene of worldly pleasure, instead of that weight of glory which he on sure grounds expected. And what is it that you give him in lieu of his hopes? Honors, riches, power: but do you not know how little value true virtue has for such possessions? Together with these you give him new fears of death; your honors and riches will not purchase life or length of days; and if he receives his good things here, what security can you give him that he shall have any thing due to him hereafter? On the whole, good men are in a much

better state, taking, as they do, their chance in the world, and relying on the justice and goodness of God for a just recompense of their labor; they have more true comfort and satisfaction in this condition than if they had the world at command, and no hopes, or but faint hopes, of future happiness.

These reasons seem to me sufficient to induce us to think that it is consonant to the wisdom and goodness of God to leave men freely to use the freedom he has given them: that having bestowed on them an understanding to know him, and to distinguish between good and evil, and sent them into this world as a place proper for the trial of their virtue, he has left them in the main to the conduct of their own reason to improve the uncertain events and casualties of life, and to glorify him either through honor or dishonor, through riches or poverty, or whatever other condition of life may fall to their share.

Though these reasons teach us not to expect from the hand of God the good things of this world in reward of virtue and obedience; yet they ought not to be carried, nay, they cannot be carried so far, as to exclude the providence of God from the care and government of the moral part of the world. It is one thing to turn a state of trial and probation into a state of rewards and punishments, by dispensing good and evil to every man according to his work; and another thing to exercise acts of government suitable to the state, and subservient to the ends of creation. If God thinks fit to prosper any nation, or to afflict any people, he has a thousand ways of doing it, without interfering with the freedom and liberty of one man. Years of plenty are a great blessing, but the fruitfulness of the season is no restraint on you or me; it is a general blessing, but it makes no distinction between good or evil. Plague and pestilence are general calamities; they may and ought to awaken all the world to a sober sense of God and themselves; but their rage is not so directed as to touch the sinners only; the good perish with the bad, and he that called both out of the world will soon make a difference; though in the sight of the world the end of both was taken to be misery. The same holds true with respect to private persons: God can correct them without breaking in on the ordinary course of his providence. If a man wants to be bowed down by afflic-

tions, fevers and agues, and all the tribe of distempers, stand ready to obey the order of Providence: but there is no mark to know a fever so sent from another; there is no appearance of the execution of judgment on a person so visited; the physic may be sent because it is wanted, but the hand that administers it does not appear.

Thus much is said to prevent mistakes: but the forementioned reasons remain still in force against the expectations which men are too apt to raise, of some immediate recompense to be bestowed on them by the interposition of Providence on account of their virtue and goodness.

Let us now proceed to consider what experience teaches in this case. That good and evil are not dispensed in this life in proportion to the merits of men, appears so plainly to all men of sense and reason, that the fact, I think, has never been disputed. The world has never been without complaints on this head. The righteous in all times have lamented their case; their hearts have been even ready to fail under the oppression of the ungodly. On the other side, the wicked, seeing their own prosperity, have been hardened, and grown secure in their iniquity, on the foolish presumption that God regarded not them nor their doings. To abate these presumptions on one hand, to silence the fears and clamors on the other, has found work for good and wise men in all ages; yet none of them called in question the truth of the case, though all condemned the perverse use made on all sides of this administration of Providence. 'Because sentence,' says the Preacher, 'against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.' That the case was so, he acknowleges: 'For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.' But this is indeed a very plain thing, and needs not to be insisted on; we may leave it to every man to judge for himself by what he can observe in

the world, and he will soon find that in fact God has not made this a place for distributing rewards or punishments, but that 'one event happeneth alike to all.'

Lastly, let us inquire how far this experience is confirmed by what the Scripture teaches us to expect.

There are some passages of holy writ, which at first hearing, and before they are duly weighed, may seem to promise more to the righteous in this life than we have been able to find either reason or experience to justify. Let us hear the Psalmist: 'I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.' How! his son Solomon saw a different scene in his days; then there were 'just men unto whom it happened according to the work of the wicked.' Again, 'there were wicked men to whom it happened according to the work of the righteous.' In the days of our Saviour and his disciples there were some righteous in Israel who begged their bread by the way-side, and at the doors of the temple. Among these we find some, who had faith enough in the Son of God to be made whole of their infirmities: an evidence, I think, that they were not in a worse condition than others, because they were worse men. The truth is, that this passage in the Psalms relates not to our present purpose; it describes a general case of providence over good men in providing them the necessaries of life, whilst they endeavor to serve God, but of a just reward for them in this world it says nothing: 'The seed of the righteous,' says the Psalmist, 'shall not beg their bread.' Take it literally, and make the most of it, it will bear no resemblance to a just reward for their goodness: for if the righteous and the wicked were to be distinguished in this life by temporal prosperity and adversity, we might expect to hear of much better promises to the good than this, 'That their seed should not beg their bread;' we might expect to hear of crowns and sceptres to be given them: but of this we hear nothing. As to the providential care of God over the righteous in supplying their natural wants, our Saviour has given us great reason to expect it: 'Seek ye first,' says he, 'the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' On whose authority likewise St. Paul tells us, that 'godliness has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to

come.' Nay, farther, there is great reason to think that God often blesses the honest endeavors of the virtuous in this world: but then there is no appearance that the rules of justice are at all concerned in such dispensations; for the righteous often suffer, nay, under the gospel they are called to suffer; for which reason the invitation to us is, 'To take up our cross and follow Christ.' But, to come to the point of rewards and punishments, the parable of the tares in the thirteenth of St. Matthew is decisive; the meaning of which parable our Saviour has expounded: it represents to us the state of the world, in which the good and bad florish together; and though men cease not to call on God for a distinction to be made between them, yet he, who seeth not as man sees, has otherwise determined. In this world he permits them to florish and live together; but the time is coming, that great harvest of the world is approaching, when a full distinction shall be made; when the wicked shall be cast into a furnace of fire, and the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Thus you see, reason, experience, and Scripture, all consenting to teach us not to look for the reward of our labor in this world, but to wait with patience God's appointed time, when the great Judge of the world will do righteously, and recompense to every man the things which he has done.

Let us look back then to the text, and take from thence the proper exhortation arising from this conclusion; since we plainly see that this world is no place of rewards and punishments, let us not be so foolish as to look for our reward here, and be discouraged if we receive it not. If we raise in ourselves such idle expectations, and imagine that to be good is a certain way to be rich, great, or prosperous, we lay a foundation for great disappointments, and shall be in danger of growing sick of our work when our hopes forsake us. But if we look to the appointed time of reward, and give ourselves up contentedly to the providence of God in this world, and to that lot, be it what it will, which he has provided for us, our hopes will never fail; we shall be steadfast and unmoveable, knowing that our labor, however difficult here, shall not be in vain in the Lord: 'for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XL.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XIII.—VERSE 29.

PART I.

To understand this text we must look back to the 24th verse of the chapter. Take away the dress of the parable here delivered, and what our Saviour says amounts to this; that there will always be in the world a mixture of good and bad men, which no care can prevent; and though men may and will imagine that the wicked ought immediately to be cut off by the hand of God, yet he judges otherwise, and delays his vengeance for wise reasons, reserving all to the great day of future retribution.

The view of this parable has in some parts been misapprehended. It is intended to represent the necessary condition of mankind, some being good and some bad, and to justify God in the delay of punishment. Hence it is going out of the way to consider the particular causes to which the sins of mankind may be ascribed; the question being, why are they not punished? In the parable our Lord assigns only a general reason of the world's wickedness, *an enemy hath done this.* But some think they see another assigned in it, viz. the carelessness of public rulers and magistrates, intimated in the words, *but while men slept, his enemy came,* &c.

There is indeed no doubt but that the negligence of governors and magistrates, civil and ecclesiastical, may often be one cause of ignorance and wickedness: but that it is assigned in the parable cannot be proved: this shown by the expression *while men slept,* which is a time of natural refreshment; it is

not said, *while they played, or were idle:* moreover the character of the husbandman agrees with this exposition; for they betray no consciousness of guilt or negligence: they come with no excuses to their master, but with a question, that shows how little they mistrusted themselves: nor does the master charge them with any fault, but rather lays it at another door: on which they desire not to spare their own pains, but are eager to go at once to work, and root up the tares which they had discovered. In this he corrects their judgment, though he condemns not their diligence. In truth, one main view of the parable is to correct the zeal of those who cannot see the iniquity of the world without violent indignation; and not being able to stop it or correct it, are apt to call on God to vindicate his own cause in the punishment of evil doers.

The men who have this zeal and warmth against iniquity, are not commonly idle negligent rulers, nor would our Saviour have painted them in such different colors in the compass of a short parable. Besides, the object of the parable plainly is to justify the wisdom of Providence in letting sin go unpunished for the present: the justification, however, does not arise from considering the causes of iniquity, but the effect which immediate punishment would have. In this view of the subject, the circumstance, *that while men slept the tares were sown*, promotes the main end of the parable, and completes the justification of God's providence: for this shows *that offences must needs come:* they are not to be prevented without disturbing the very course of nature, and miraculously suspending the operation of second causes. The scope of the parable being thus explained, the text is considered more particularly; which contains the reason why God delays to punish sin in this world, and reserves it for future judgment.

There are two ways in which the words of the text may be considered: I. as they regard the particular case in view, and account for the justice of God in suspending his judg-

ments: II. as they furnish us with a principle of reason and equity applicable to many other cases. To see the full force of the first, it is necessary to understand what sort of sinners are spoken of: for this reason is not applicable to all; many sinners being spared on other accounts. The sinners represented by the tares in the text are spared merely on account of the righteous: they are such as are incorrigible; and therefore there is no room to justify a delay of punishment from any circumstances arising out of their own case: our Saviour himself declares that they will be inevitably punished at last, and justifies the wisdom and goodness of God in sparing them from other motives.

The interests of good and bad men are so united in this world, that no signal calamity can befal the wicked, but the righteous must have their share in it. It is therefore out of mercy to them that the wicked are spared: and this was Abraham's plea when he interceded for the men of Sodom. In public calamities it is very evident that all must be common sufferers. Thus far then the reason of the text certainly extends, and shows us the great mercy of God in forbearing to destroy sinners by such exemplary punishments as would involve whole communities in calamity.

But, it may be said, there are many ways of punishing sinners without including others; and if the wicked are spared only for the sake of the righteous, why are they exempted from these?

In answer to which several things may be said: and first, he that asks the question, may in return be asked, how he knows but that the wicked are often and commonly so punished? can he distinguish such as fall in the common course of nature, from those who are cut of by the judgments of God? It may therefore be true that God does exercise this retributive justice. But, secondly, allow the matter of the objection to be true, yet the reasoning will not be good; because our Saviour's resolution of the general case extends to these instances also;

and the wicked are often exempted even from private judgment, that the righteous may not suffer in their ruin: for almost every wicked man has innocent relations and friends, whose happiness depends on his prosperity: this point enlarged on. Nor will the justice of God hereby suffer: for the day is coming which will dissolve all the present relations between men, when every one will stand singly by himself to account for the good or evil he has done.

On the whole then, this method of God's dealing with mankind is in all respects without reproach: and the complaints commonly made with respect to his forbearance in punishing iniquity, show the lenity of his administration, and the little reason we have to complain when we have to seek how we may account for his want of justice rather than of mercy: this subject enlarged on.

It has been observed that the argument in the text extends to one case only; to the justifying God's wisdom and goodness, in delaying to punish incorrigible sinners: but if this case can be defended, all others may; yet as these have their particular reasons, a summary view of the argument is given.

Such is the state and condition of human nature, that no care or diligence can prevent the growth of vice: every one sees this; and it is confessed by those who require God's constant interposition to prevent it: but what is it which they demand, who require that God should by his irresistible power prevent all evil? nothing less than that he should destroy all law and religion, and divest men of their distinguishing characters, reason and understanding: for if every thing is to be done by a superior force, this must be the case. Since then offences must needs come, the question is, properly asked, why are not men as certainly distinguished by rewards and punishments as they are by virtue or vice? for this would be a great encouragement to virtue, and ought to be expected from God's justice. The first return to these questioners is to let them

know that they inquire into a matter too high for them: the deserts of men must necessarily be estimated by a rule of which they are not masters, that is, by the sincerity of the heart; and therefore they can never judge when rewards and punishments are duly administered: they may possibly be mistaken in those very cases which they suppose to call for the most signal examples. The next return to them is, that what they require is inconsistent with the present condition of men, and the goodness of God. Men are in a state of trial and probation, and it is fit they should have time to show themselves: and it would ill become the goodness of God to destroy men, as long as there are hopes of their amendment: to bear therefore with their sins, in prospect of their repentance, is both just and merciful: and with respect to incorrigible sinners, this world is not the proper place for their punishment, because it would involve the righteous in calamity. There is no reason therefore for a man to complain, whether he be himself a sinner or a righteous person.

PART II.

The text considered as furnishing us with a principle of reason and equity applicable to many cases.

This inquiry necessary, because the rule is liable to be misapplied, unless we attend to the reasons on which it is founded. The mercy of God is the best pattern for us, and is recommended to us by our Saviour. Since therefore God spares the wicked for the sake of the righteous, is it reasonable for men to do the same? Should magistrates release the guilty on account of the innocent, who must share in the shame or loss of the punishment? At first sight we might imagine there was a parity of reason in these cases; but on farther consideration we shall find that the same reason which justifies God, would condemn the magistrate.

To see this clearly, we must attend to the difference between the reason of justice and the rules of justice. By the latter is to be understood the general principles and maxims of justice by which the laws of all countries are directed: by the former, the fountain from which all maxims and laws are derived, i. e. right reason: for laws are not just, as partaking of the law-giver's authority, but as partaking of his reason. Hence the distinction between good and bad laws, though both are derived from the same authority.

Now between the reason of justice and the rules of justice, there is this great difference: the former takes in all the circumstances of every case, and therefore cannot be wrong; but the latter have no relation to the particular circumstances of any case, being formed on general abstract ideas; and consequently they may, and often do, fail when applied to single instances: hence the reason and the maxims of justice frequently stand directly opposed to each other; and hence the proverb *summum jus, summa injuria*. Hence it will plainly appear how liable we are to mistake, as long as we form our judgments by applying general rules of law or equity to particular cases. This point farther explained.

Now there is the same difference between the judgments of God and those of men, as there is between the reason of law and the rules of law: for men are tied down to judge by the rules which the law prescribes; but the judgment of God arises not from any maxim or rule of law, but in every instance follows the reason of the thing; otherwise his judgments would not in every case be reasonable. It is mere weakness that makes men go by rules: but it would be absurd to imagine God as acting by any such for the direction of his judgment.

Farther; these considerations will help us to form distinct notions of justice and mercy, and discover to us, if not what they always are, at least what they should be. Justice is thought to be a thing fixed and certain, and confined to limits

which it cannot transgress without losing its name: but mercy is taken to be of a more variable nature, to go by no fixed rule, and to arise from the will of the governor: consequently we speak of mercy and justice as opposites to each other.

But mercy and justice would not be distinguished, were it not for the intervention of general and particular laws, which often fall very heavily on particular persons; whence it is that we complain of the rigor of the law: but were men perfect both in their reason and in their wills, so that they could neither judge nor act amiss, they would then do what is exactly right and reasonable in every case, and there would be no room to correct the severity of justice by the interposition of mercy; for there is no rigor in that which is perfectly right and reasonable: this point enlarged on; by which it is shown that it is the proper business of mercy to correct the rules of justice by the reason of justice; and consequently, if all judgments were founded on true reason, justice and mercy would be one and the same thing. Hence perhaps a difficulty may be accounted for, which is apt to disturb men greatly when they ponder the judgments of God. They consider him as essentially just, and essentially merciful; whence they rightly conclude that he can never be otherwise than merciful, never otherwise than just; and yet how to reconcile these attributes in every case they see not. In human judgments it is plain, where mercy prevails, justice sleeps; where justice acts, mercy is silent: but this cannot be the case in divine judgments. But if we consider that the acts of mercy and justice, as distinguished from each other, are relative to stated rules and laws, and that they are both the same with respect to the reason of justice, we shall easily discern how God, who always acts by the purest reason, may be said in every case to do justly and mercifully: this point enlarged on.

The parable in the text is evidently intended as an answer to the common objections against Providence, drawn from

the prosperity of sinners, or rather, in the present instance, the impunity of offenders. If the principles on which both the objection and the answer stands be examined, it will be seen that the objection is founded on one of the common and general maxims of justice which often misguide our judgment in particular cases; and that our Saviour's answer is drawn from the reason of all law and equity, which can never fail. All the objector can say amounts to this, that it is an undoubted maxim of justice, that every sinner deserves punishment: he cannot enter into particular cases, unless he knew more of men than he does or ever will know. In answer to this, our Saviour owns the truth of the general maxim, and therefore teaches us that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world: but then he shows, from superior reasons of justice, that the application of the principle in the present case is wrong; for though it would be just to punish all sinners, yet to punish them immediately would destroy the very reason which makes it just to punish them, viz. to make a difference between the good and the bad.

This then is a full justification of God in his dealings with men, and shows his justice, as well as his mercy, in delaying vengeance.

But if this be the height of justice in God, how is it not the height of injustice in men to act quite otherwise? Temporal punishments, even capital ones, are executed immediately, notwithstanding the number of innocent persons that may be involved in their consequences. Nay, farther, this very method of justice is ordained by God. How comes it then that God pursues one method for himself and another for magistrates, who are, as it were, his vicegereuts? The plain answer is, because the reason of these two cases is very different. The punishments of this world are not the final punishments of iniquity, but are means ordained to secure virtue and morality, and to protect the innocent from immediate violence: offences

which disturb the peace of society and the security of its members, will not bear a delay of justice; and this world would scarcely be habitable if such crimes were to wait for their punishment in another.

Our Saviour's reasoning, when applied to this case, leads to another conclusion: that the righteous may not suffer, God delays the final punishment of the wicked: for the same reason, that is, that the righteous may not suffer, he has commanded the magistrate to cut off all the sons of violence, all disturbers of the public peace. And thus he has followed the same reason in both cases: this point enlarged on to the end.

DISCOURSE XL.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XIII.—VERSE 29.

But he said, Nay; lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

PART I.

To understand the text we must look back as far as the twenty-fourth verse of this chapter, where our Saviour put forth a parable, comparing the kingdom of heaven to a man who 'sowed good seed in his field; but, while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.' When they both sprang up and appeared in the field, the servants, under a surprise at the disappointment, report it to their master; 'Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?' He said unto them, 'An enemy hath done this.' The servants reply, 'Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?' In answer to which follows the words of the text, 'But he said, Nay; lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.'

Take away the dress of parable, and what our Saviour here delivers amounts to this; there will always be a mixture in the world of good and bad men, which no care or diligence can prevent; and though men may and will judge, that the wicked ought immediately to be cut off by the hand of God, yet God judges otherwise, and delays his vengeance for wise and just reasons; sparing the wicked at present for the sake of the righteous; reserving all to that great day in which the divine justice shall be fully displayed, and every man shall receive according to his own works.

The view of this parable has, in some parts of it, I think,

been misapprehended. It is intended to represent the necessary condition of mankind, some being good, some bad; a mixture which, from the very nature of mankind, is always to be expected; and to justify God in delaying the punishment of those sins, which all the world think are ripe for vengeance. This being the view of the parable, it is going out of the way to consider the particular causes to which the sins of men may be ascribed; for the question is not, from whence the sins of men arise; but why, from whatever cause they spring, they are not punished. In the parable therefore our Lord assigns only a general reason of the wickedness of the world, 'An enemy hath done this.' But there are who think they see another reason assigned in the parable, namely, the carelessness of the public governors and rulers, intimated in those words, 'But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat:' and this text always finds a place in such complaints. And there is indeed no doubt but that the negligence of governors and magistrates, civil and ecclesiastical, may be often one cause of the ignorance and wickedness of the people: but that it is assigned as a cause in the parable cannot be proved; for these words, 'while men slept,' instead of charging the servants with negligence, plainly show that no care or diligence of theirs could prevent the enemy. Whilst they were awake, their care was awake also, and the enemy had no access: but sleep they must, nature requires it; and then it was the enemy did the mischief. Had it been said, while men played or were careless or riotous, that would have been a charge on them; but to say 'while men slept,' is so far from proving that their negligence caused it, that it plainly proves their diligence could not prevent it. For, what will you say? Should husbandmen never sleep? It is a condition on which they cannot live, and therefore their sleeping cannot be charged as their crime. This circumstance therefore in the parable is to show, not the fault of the husbandmen, but the zeal and industry of the enemy to do mischief. Watch him as narrowly as you will, yet still he will break through all your care and diligence. If you do but step aside, compelled by the call of nature, to eat, to drink, or to sleep, he is ready to take the opportunity to sow his tares; and the ground, which will not

answer the husbandman's hope without his toil, and labor, and cost, will produce the ill seed of its own accord, and yield but too plentiful a crop. Farther, the character of the husbandmen throughout the parable agrees to this exposition: when they saw the tares spring up, they betrayed no consciousness of guilt or negligence; they did not come with excuses to their master, but with a question, which plainly speaks how little they mistrusted themselves: 'Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?' Would any servant, who had suffered the field to grow wild by his own laziness, have expostulated the case in such a manner? The master, far from charging any of his family with the fault, lays it at another door, 'An enemy hath done this.' On which the servants, not sparing of their own pains, were desirous to go to work immediately, and to root out all the tares at once. What is there in all this that suits with the character of a lazy, idle, negligent servant? What is there that does not speak a care and concern for their master's affairs? As soon as they discover the tares, they go directly to their master, and inform him, and offer their service to root them out. In this particular he corrects their judgment, though he does not condemn their diligence. And, in truth, one main view of the parable is to correct the zeal of those who cannot see the iniquity of the world without great indignation; and not being able to stop or to correct it themselves, are apt to call on God to vindicate his own cause, by taking the matter to himself, and punishing the evil doers. The men who have this zeal and warmth against iniquity, are not commonly the idle, negligent rulers; nor can we suppose that our Saviour would paint the same men in such different colors in the compass of a short parable, representing them idle and careless at the twenty-fifth verse, active and zealous at the twenty-eighth. Besides, as was observed before, to charge the wickedness of the world on the negligence of this or that part of men, answers no purpose of the parable, which is to justify the wisdom of Providence in permitting the sins of men to go unpunished for the present: but the justification does not arise from considering the causes of iniquity, but from considering the effect which immediate punishment would have. In the other way now explained to you, this circumstance,

'that while men slept the tares were sown,' promotes the main end of the parable, and completes the justification of the providence of God: for this shows 'that offences must needs come;' they are not to be prevented without disturbing the very course of nature, without God's interposing miraculously to suspend the workings in second causes; since all care exercised in a human way is too little, for even when men sleep, and sleep they must, the enemy will sow his tares. Since therefore the parable shows that iniquity can neither be prevented nor immediately punished, consistently with the wisdom and goodness of God, it shuts out every complaint, and forces us to acknowlege that God is just in all his ways, and righteous in all his dealings with mankind.

The scope of the parable being thus accounted for, let us now proceed to consider the text more particularly; which contains the reason why God delays to punish the sins of men in this world, reserving them to the judgment which shall be hereafter. There are two ways in which we may consider the words of the text:

First, as they regard the particular case in view, and account for the justice of God in suspending his judgments.

Secondly, as they furnish us with a principle of reason and equity applicable to many other cases.

First, as they regard the particular case in view, and account for the justice of God in suspending his judgments. To see the full force of the reason in this respect, it is necessary to understand what sort of sinners are spoken of; for this reason is not applicable to all cases, many sinners are spared on other accounts than this which is given us in the text. The sinners intended in the text are spared merely on account of the righteous, that they may not be involved in the punishment due to the sins of others: but some sinners are spared out of a mercy which regards themselves, in hopes of their amendment. Thus St. Paul has taught us that the 'riches of God's goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, lead to repentance.' The sinners, who are represented by the tares in the text, are such of whose repentance and amendment there is no hope; for tares, let them grow ever so long, will still be tares; they can never

turn to wheat. And our Saviour has told us in the close of the parable, that these sinners shall certainly be punished at the last; which cannot certainly be said of any but incorrigible sinners, for 'he that repenteth, and forsaketh the evil of his way, shall save his soul alive.'

The sinners therefore being considered as incorrigible, there was no room to justify the delay of punishment from any circumstances arising out of their own case. Even the mercy of God was excluded in this circumstance; for if the incorrigible sinner be the object of mercy, no sinner need fear punishment. Our Saviour therefore gives them up intirely, and justifies the wisdom and goodness of God in sparing them from other motives. The interests of good and bad men are so united in this world, there is such a connexion between them in many respects, that no signal calamity can befal the wicked, but the righteous must have his share in it. It is out of mercy therefore to the righteous that God spares the wicked, lest, whilst he gathers up the tares, he should root out the wheat also. This was Abraham's plea when he interceded with the Lord for the men of Sodom, 'Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?' The reason of which plea was so strong, that, had there been ten righteous persons in the city, the whole had been preserved from ruin. In public calamities it is evident that all must be sufferers without distinction; fire and sword, famine and pestilence, rage indifferently in the borders of the righteous and the sinner, and sweep away one as well as the other. Thus far then the reason of the text most certainly extends, and shows us the great mercy of God in forbearing to appear against sinners in such visible and exemplary punishments, which would destroy whole countries, and bring even on the best of men the punishment due only to the worst.

But are there not, you will say, many ways of punishing men without including others in the calamity? Do not fevers and many other distempers carry off single persons without spreading farther? And would not these be proper messengers of Providence to single out desperate sinners, in which case there would be no danger of involving the righteous in the punishment of the wicked? And if the wicked are spared only for

the sake of the righteous, why are they exempted from these punishments, in which the righteous have no concern or connexion with them?

In answer to which, several things may be said: and first, to him that asks the question, an answer may be returned by a like question—how do you know but that the wicked are often and commonly thus punished? and that the thing is done every day which you complain of as never done? Wicked men die every day, and die in the way you speak of, some by fevers, some by other distempers or accidents. Can you distinguish which of them fall in the common way of nature, and which are taken away by the secret judgments of God? Can you tell by the pulse when a fever is to be reckoned among the common accidents of life, and when to be ascribed to the vengeance of God? If not, how can you tell but that every hour may produce such instances as you complain are very rare and scarce to be found, and the want of which you think so great an objection against an overruling Providence? As to outward appearance, the same casualties attend both the good and the bad; but he has thought very little, who cannot see that the outward appearance is no rule to judge by in this case. Lazarus died, and the rich man died also: thus far there was no distinction in their fate; the lookers-on could not say which was taken away in mercy, and which in judgment: but the very next scene cleared up all the doubt, and showed how terrible a judgment death was to the rich man, how great a mercy to the poor one: for the rich man died, and was tormented in hell; the poor man died, and was carried to Abraham's bosom. It may therefore be true that God does exercise many judgments on the wicked in this silent manner, though it is not in our power to point out the particular instances, or pronounce on single persons, who are under judgments, and who not. Now the objection from the want of such punishments can have no more force than the objector has certainty that there are no such punishments; and since there is no certainty in one, there can be no force in the other.

But, secondly; allow the matter of the objection to be true, that there are great numbers of wicked men ripe for destruction, who yet escape all these punishments, who live and florish in

the world, and at last die the common death of men, and, as far as we can judge, go down in peace to their graves; yet still, though this be allowed, the reasoning of the objection will not be good, because our Saviour's resolution of the general case extends to these instances also; and the wicked are often exempted even from private judgment, that the righteous may not be overwhelmed in their ruin. For consider; you see a great wicked man in a prosperous and florishing condition, and you think his happy tranquillity a perpetual reproach to the providence of God: what would you have done? You would not have God rain fire and brimstone on the city for the sake of this great offender, since many innocent persons would necessarily suffer in the ruin? No; but you would have God take him away suddenly by some secret and silent method; or you would have him punished in his fortune, and reduced to that poverty which his sins deserve. This, you think, would be very just and reasonable, and highly becoming the wisdom of God. But pray, has your wicked man no friends or relations, whose happiness depends on his prosperity? Has he no children who must beg with him when he falls into poverty and distress? There is no great man who is not related to others in some, if not in all these circumstances. If then you allow in general the equity of sparing the wicked for the sake of the righteous, you must consider their case over again, and answer these few questions: Are all the relations and dependents of this great sinner as wicked as himself? Is there not one good man the better for him? Are his children all reprobates? Or would you turn out a family of innocent children to seek their bread in the streets, rather than let the iniquity of the father go unpunished for a few years? Till you can answer these questions, you must not pretend to arraign the wisdom and goodness of God in sparing this offender; for you know not how many innocent, how many virtuous persons may be crushed in his fall; and when you can answer them, you shall have leave to judge. Now these considerations plainly show the equity and goodness of God in delaying the punishment of the wicked for the present, both with respect to the public calamities which the general corruption calls for, and with respect to the private punishments which the sins of particular men, if considered alone and by

themselves, do richly deserve. In both cases mercy triumphs over justice, and the guilty is preserved for the sake of the innocent; which is such an act of goodness as no man surely has reason to complain of. As to the justice of God, neither will that suffer in this account. The day is coming which will dissolve all the present relations between men, when every one will stand singly by himself to account for the good or evil he has done. In that day the wicked shall not escape, nor shall his punishment affect the righteous, but his iniquity shall be on his own head only. When the 'harvest comes,' the Master will order his servants to 'separate the tares from the wheat;' the one he will 'gather into his barns,' the other he will give up to be 'burnt with unquenchable fire.'

On the whole then, this method of God's dealing with the children of men is, in all its parts, without reproach. Even this complaint, which is so commonly made against the administration of Providence, that the wicked are permitted to live unpunished, is itself a great argument how little reason we have to complain, since it shows the lenity of the government we are under: and surely it is our happiness, that we are more to seek in accounting for the justice of God than for his mercy. Were God to be as rigid in the execution of justice, as such complainers seem to require he should be, what should you or I get by it? What we get by his mercy we know, or ought to know, I am sure, if we understand ourselves, and our own condition: and for sinners to upbraid God with want of justice against sinners, that is, against themselves, is a crime which carries with it so much folly, as I hope may in some measure excuse the insolence, since nothing else can. Were the case to be altered, and God to appear as terrible in justice as he is wonderful in mercy, how much more should we be puzzled to account for his proceeding? As we see many now spared whom we account great sinners, we should then see many punished whom we esteem good men: for all are not good who seem to be so. And how then should we be called on to justify the severity of God; a severity which, to our thinking, fell alike on the righteous and the unrighteous? for whatever way God takes, the thing must appear mysterious to us; for the faces and the hearts of men are often at variance, and we,

who can only judge by the outward show, should often be at a loss to discern the equity of his proceeding, who judges by the heart. Should God therefore proceed to punish all who deserve it, we should still have the same objection, that punishments and rewards were not equally administered; and since we must be in the dark, how much happier is it for us to be in such a case, where we think we see too little of the justice of God, than in a condition, where we should soon think we saw too little of his mercy? The advantage which our present situation affords is such a balance on the account, that we safely defy every bold objector, and enter into his reckoning without fear or danger; for in every step the goodness of God shines forth as bright as the sun at noon day; and let those call for his justice who are willing to abide the trial by it.

I observed to you that the argument in the text extends to one case only, to the justifying the wisdom and goodness of God in delaying the punishment of incorrigible sinners. It is true indeed, that if this case can be defended, all others may; and therefore this argument is by consequence a full defence of the providence of God, as it relates to the punishment of sinners: but as other cases have their particular reasons, give me leave to close this discourse with presenting to you a summary view of the case in its several circumstances.

That men are sinners is supposed in the objection against the justice of God for not punishing sin; and therefore, in strictness of reasoning, it belongs not to this question to account for the wisdom of God in permitting sin: and yet this inquiry is so nearly allied to the present case, that our Lord in the parable has incidently cleared this point, 'While men slept, the enemy sowed his tares.' Such is the condition of human nature, such the state of the world, that no care or diligence can prevent the growth of vice: and as every body sees this to be the case, so it is confessed by those who demand a reason why God does not interpose to prevent iniquity; for as the question refers the preventing vice to the overruling power of God, so it supposes no other remedy to be sufficient to the evil. But what is it that they demand, who require that God should by his irresistible power prevent all evil? Nothing less than

that he should destroy all law and religion, and divest men of that which is at present their distinguishing character, reason and understanding: for if every thing is to be done by a superior force, there is an end of all law, and of all the use and exercise of reason. It is said to be a crime in some eastern country for the subjects to look on the prince; and therefore when he appears, they fall down and hide their faces. Now this law or custom necessarily supposes that the subjects have eyes; for should the emperor blind all his subjects, it would be ridiculous to charge them not to look on him. The same would be the case with respect to all laws in general, should God necessarily overrule the wills of them; for to bid men not do that which it is impossible they ever should do, is absurd and ridiculous.

Since then offences must needs come, the question is, properly asked, why are not men as certainly distinguished by rewards and punishments as they are by virtue or vice? This would be a mighty encouragement to virtue, and what is to be expected from the justice of God. The first return to this question is to let men know that they inquire not wisely concerning this matter, for the thing is too high for them: for since the deserts of men must necessarily be estimated by a rule which they are not masters of, that is, by the sincerity of their hearts, they can never judge when rewards and punishments are duly administered: and therefore their reason fails; for a due administration of rewards and punishments in this world would not tend, as they suppose, to the encouragement of virtue, because men cannot judge when there is such an administration or when not; and possibly too they may be mistaken in those very cases, which they think deserve to be made signal examples of vindictive justice. The next return to the question is, that what they require is inconsistent with the present condition of men and the goodness of God. As to the condition of men, they are in a state of trial and probation, and therefore it is fit they should have time to show themselves; which they would not have, were every offence to meet with its due recompense of reward immediately. As to the goodness of God, it would ill become him to destroy men, as long as there are hopes of their amendment; and therefore to bear with the sins of

men, in prospect of their repentance, is both just and merciful. Thus to bear with the sins of men is inconsistent with punishing the sins of men, as soon as the world thinks they deserve it; for who can say when men are past all hope? But farther, even as to incorrigible sinners, though nothing can be said for them, yet much may be said to show that this world is no proper place for their punishment: for the good and bad are here so united together, that it is not possible to separate them in temporal punishments; and therefore God bears with them out of mere mercy to the righteous.

Thus then the case stands: and now consider who has reason to complain. Examine your own conscience; if you are a sinner, it ill becomes you to call for vengeance; if you are righteous, or think yourself so, why should you murmur, since it is for your sake that the wicked are preserved from immediate ruin, that you may not be overwhelmed in their destruction? Consider also, which is the conclusion of the whole matter, 'that God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness;' in which all the seeming inequalities of Providence shall be set right, and every tongue shall confess that the Lord is just, and righteous, and holy in all his ways.

DISCOURSE XL.

PART II.

It now remains that we consider the text as furnishing us with a principle of reason and equity applicable to many cases.

It is the more necessary to make this inquiry, because the rule in the text is liable to be misapplied, unless we carefully attend to the reasons on which it is founded, from which only we can learn in what cases the rule is applicable, in what not. The mercy of God is the best pattern that we can copy after,

and our Lord has recommended to us 'to be merciful, even as our heavenly Father is merciful.' Since therefore God spares the wicked who deserve punishment, nay, who are ripe for final destruction, for the sake of the righteous, that they may not partake in their sufferings, what shall we say? Is it reasonable that men should act in like manner? that magistrates, who are dispensers of temporal punishments, should release the guilty, because of the innocent who are nearly concerned in the fortunes of the guilty, and who must share either in the shame or the loss of the punishment? At first sight, perhaps, you may imagine there is a parity of reason in these cases; and yet on farther consideration you will find that the same reason which justifies God in delaying the punishment of the wicked, would condemn the magistrate, should he permit the guilty to live unpunished.

To come at this view clearly, we must attend to the difference between the reason of justice and the rules of justice. By the rules of justice, I understand the general principles and maxims of justice by which the laws of all countries are governed and directed. By the reason of justice, I understand the fountain from which all maxims and all laws are derived, which is no other than right reason itself: for laws are not just, as partaking of the authority of the lawgiver, but as partaking of his reason. And hence comes the distinction between good and bad laws, though both derived from the same authority; which shows, that authority, though it may make a valid law, yet it cannot make a good one, unless acting on the reason of justice. Now between the reason of justice and the rules of justice there is this great difference; the reason of justice takes in all circumstances of every case, and therefore cannot err in its judgment; but the maxims of justice have no relation to the particular circumstances of any case, but are formed on general abstracted ideas, and consequently they often may and do fail, when they are applied to single instances: from whence it often happens that the reason of justice, and the maxims of justice, stand in direct opposition to one another. And this gave occasion to that proverbial speech, *summum jus, summa injuria;* for the words in themselves, unless you have respect to the different rules to which they refer, are a plain contradiction. For it is not to be affirmed that what is *summum jus* according to the

law, is, according to the same law, *summa injuria:* but the truth of the proverb is to be understood by referring the parts of it to their proper rules. *Summum jus* regards the written law; *summa injuria* regards the original reason of all law. And then in many cases it happens that the letter of the law contradicts the reason of the law: and the cause of this I before observed, because laws and maxims of law have no regard to the circumstances of particular cases, which circumstances nevertheless do sometimes intirely alter the nature of the case.

Hence it plainly appears how liable we are to mistake, as long as we form our judgments by applying general rules of law or equity to particular cases. Thus, for instance, it is a right maxim of justice, that all sinners should be punished; and the maxim is derived from the certain difference of virtue and vice, from the ends of reward and punishment, which are adapted to promote virtue and discourage vice. Place then before you a particular sinner: by the rule of justice he must die; but what if it should appear, from the circumstances of his case, that you cannot punish him consistently with the ends of justice, that is, you cannot promote virtue, or discourage vice, you cannot distinguish good from evil in his case, but must afflict both alike? What will you say? Shall the general maxim prevail contrary to the very reasons on which the maxim itself is founded? Or shall the reasons of justice and equity prevail to supersede a general law, which is not applicable to the present case?

Now there is the same difference between the judgments of God and the judgments of men, as there is between the rules of law and the reason of law: for men are tied down to judge by the rules which the law prescribes; but the judgment of God does not arise from any rule or maxim of law, but in every instance follows the reason of the thing to be judged of; otherwise his judgments would not in every case be reasonable. It is mere weakness that makes men go by rules; and because they are not able to judge accurately on all emergent cases, therefore they have general rules for their direction. But how absurd would it be to imagine God as acting by any such rules, as having recourse to stated laws or maxims for the direction of his judgment in particular instances? As reason is in all cases the fountain of justice, and of all laws and principles of law, so

the divine reason, which is perfect, is in every case the true measure of justice. From hence it evidently appears, that since the judgments of God are not formed on the general notions and principles of justice which we are conversant in, those notions can be no safe rules for us in the examination of the ways of Providence, because our rules do not always extend to the reason of particular cases; but the judgments of God do always regard the reasons and circumstances of every case.

Farther; these considerations will help us to form distinct notions of justice and mercy, and discover to us, if not what they always are, yet at least what they always should be. Justice is thought to be a thing fixed and certain, and to have its proper bounds and limits, which it cannot transgress without losing its name; but mercy is taken to be of a more variable, uncertain nature, to have no rule to go by, but to arise from the will of the governor: and consequently we usually speak of justice and mercy as opposites to each other, and suppose that mercy can have no place unless justice recedes to make room for it. What does or may happen in the world we are not concerned to inquire; our business is to search after the true notions of justice and mercy, not the corrupt practices in either. Now mercy and justice would not be distinguished were it not for the intervention of general and particular alws, which often fall very heavy on particular persons; whence it is that we complain of the rigor and hardness of the law; but were men perfect both in their reason and in their wills, so that they could neither judge amiss nor act amiss, they would then do that which is exactly right and reasonable in every case, and there would be no room to correct the rigor of justice by the interposition of mercy; for there is no rigor in that which is perfectly right and reasonable. For consider what are the pleas for mercy: do they not arise from the circumstances of the person or the action, which show that the law is too hard in his case, and that he ought in reason to be eased against the extremity of the law? But had all these circumstances been weighed in the first judgment, and justice adapted to the very merits of the case, all the pleas for mercy had been prevented, and consequently there had been no room for mercy; for mercy without reason is a mere effect of arbitrary power, and not of goodness.

But now that all cases are judged by laws made long before the cases happened, and which cannot consider the alleviations or aggravations of particular facts, it comes to pass sometimes that the law is a very inadequate rule of justice in cases that fall under it. Shall the person then suffer according to the rule of justice against all reason of justice? No; he ought to have the benefit of mercy, and to be relieved against the rigor of the law. What then, because the punishment of the law is too heavy for his crime, ought he therefore to go unpunished? because this punishment is unreasonable, shall he therefore escape that which is reasonable? No; for though mercy ought to take off the rigor of justice, yet it ought not to destroy justice itself. It is evident then that it is the proper work of mercy to correct the rules of justice by the reason of justice; and, consequently, were all judgments formed on the true reasons of justice, justice and mercy would be one and the same thing.

Hence perhaps we may be able to account for a difficulty which is apt mightily to disturb men when they ponder the judgments of God: they consider him as essentially just and essentially merciful, from whence they rightly conclude that he can never be otherwise than merciful, never otherwise than just; and yet how to reconcile these attributes in every case they see not. In human judgments it is plain, where mercy prevails, justice sleeps; where justice acts, mercy is silent: but this cannot be the case in divine judgments, because God can cease neither to be just nor merciful. But if we consider that the acts of mercy and justice, as they are distinguished from one another, are relative to stated rules and laws, and that they are both the same with respect to the reason of justice; we shall easily discern how God, who always acts by the purest reason, that is, by his own, may be said in every judgment to do justly and mercifully. For when God does that which is perfectly reasonable, all circumstances weighed, in every case, there is no case in which any one can complain for want either of mercy or justice; for if there be any reason to complain, it must be because the thing in some respects is not reasonable; and therefore, when the reason of justice is exactly pursued, you have the true point, where mercy and justice meet together: and this is the point in which all the judgments of God do centre. I speak

here of the judgments of God properly so called; for those acts of goodness which he exercises in right of his supreme sovereignty and dominion are not within our present view. And that this account is true, you may partly collect from the instance in which the text is concerned: our Saviour does not justify God for delaying the punishment of the wicked, by distinguishing between the mercy and justice of God, and showing how mercy triumphed over justice in this delay; but he appeals to the reason of the case, and shows that God did what was fit and becoming a wise judge and governor; and that the thing complained of as a defect of justice was, all its circumstances considered, the height of justice and equity: and this will plainly appear in the application we are to make of what has been said to this particular case.

The parable, of which the text is part, is evidently intended as an answer to the common objection against Providence, drawn from the prosperity of sinners, or rather, in the present case, from the impunity of offenders. If you examine on what principles the objection proceeds, and on what principles the answer, you will find that the objection is founded on one of the common and general maxims of justice, which, as I have already shown, do often misguide our judgments in particular cases; and that our Saviour's answer is drawn from the reason of all law and equity, which can never fail. Ask the man who makes this objection against God's government, why he thinks it unbecoming the wisdom of God to delay the punishment of sinners? he will readily answer, because it is contrary to his justice; and to support his reason he will farther add, that it is an undoubted maxim of justice that all sinners deserve punishment. And here, I think, he must stop; for he cannot enter into particular cases, unless he knew more of men than he does or can know. In answer to this, our Saviour owns the truth of the general maxim, as far as it relates to the desert of sinners; and therefore teaches us that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world: but then he shows from superior reasons of justice, that the application of the principle in the present case is wrong; for though it be just to punish all sinners, yet to punish them immediately would destroy the very reason which makes it just to punish them. It is just to punish them that

there may be a difference made between the good and the bad according to their deserts, that their punishment may be a discouragement to vice, an encouragement to virtue. Now our Lord shows in this parable that the immediate punishment of the wicked would quite destroy these ends of justice; for the righteous and the wicked, like the wheat and tares growing together in one field, are so mixed and united in interest in this world, that, as things stand, the wicked cannot be rooted out, but the righteous must suffer with them: consequently the immediate destruction of the wicked, since it must inevitably fall on the righteous also, would make no proper distinction between the good and the bad; could be no encouragement to virtue, for the virtuous would suffer; could be no discouragement to vice, for vice would fare as well as virtue: and therefore it is not only reasonable to delay the punishment of the wicked, but even necessary to the obtaining the ends of justice, since they cannot be obtained in their immediate destruction.

This then is a full justification of God in his dealings with men; and shows his justice as well as his mercy in not executing wrath and vengeance as soon as sinners are ripe for them. But if this be the height of justice in God, how is it not the height of injustice in men to deal with one another quite otherwise? Temporal punishments, even those which are capital, are executed immediately; though often it happens that many innocents suffer in the punishment of one injurious person. The law does not consider who shall maintain the children, when it seizes the father's estate as forfeited; nor does justice relent for fear she should make a miserable widow, and many wretched orphans, by the severe blow which cuts off the guilty husband and father. Nay, farther; this very method of justice is ordained by God, and magistrates are not at liberty totally to suspend the execution of justice; and how comes God to pursue one method of justice himself, and to prescribe another to his vicegerents? The plain answer is, because the reason of these two cases is very different. The punishments of this world are not the final punishments of iniquity: but are means ordained to secure virtue and morality, and to protect the innocent from immediate violence. Offences which disturb the peace of society, and the security of private persons, will not bear a

delay of justice; for the end of justice, in this case, is to secure peace: but this end can never be served by permitting thieves, and murderers, and rebels, to go unpunished; and though, whenever they suffer, many innocents may suffer with them, yet many more would suffer in their impunity; and this world would be scarcely habitable, were such crimes as these to wait for their punishment till another world succeeded this. Our Saviour's reasoning, when applied to this case, leads to another conclusion; that the righteous may not suffer, God delays the final punishment of the wicked; for the same reason, that the righteous may not suffer, he has commanded the magistrate to cut off all the sons of violence, all disturbers of the public peace and quiet. And in so doing he has followed the same reason in both cases, namely, that the righteous may be preserved and protected: in one case preserved from the violence of the wicked; in the other from the contagion of their punishment. In a word, offences against men must be corrected and discouraged by present punishment, or else this world will be a scene of great woe and misery to the best of men: violence will prevail, and the meek, far from inheriting the earth, will be rooted out of it. Offences against God, though of a deeper dye, yet have not in them the same call for immediate vengeance: for God suffers not from the wickedness of men; the ends of justice are best served by the delay, and his goodness is at present displayed in his forbearance; and his honor will soon be vindicated in a more public theatre than that of this present world, in the sight of all the dead as well as of all the living.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XLI.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XXVI.—VERSE 41.

For the better understanding of these words we must reflect a little on what occasion they were spoken, &c. The time of our Saviour's crucifixion was now at hand, and he had foretold to his disciples that they should all be offended because of him: on which St. Peter made a forward profession of constancy, as did they all: but it does not appear that they fully understood our Saviour, or were apprehensive that they should so soon lose him: if they had, they could not have been so negligent and unconcerned. But Jesus, as he had a different sense of what he was to undergo, so was he differently affected.

No one was ever more willing to fulfil the will of God than he was; he came into the world for this very purpose. But yet, in this last and sharp trial, he found how great the weakness of the flesh was: whence probably arose the reflexion mentioned in the text, which is the ground of his exhortation to the disciples. Though they had made a very bold and forward resolution to die with him rather than deny him, yet he knew that such resolution was not a sufficient support against the weakness of human nature; but that they stood in need of all the advantages that might be reaped from watchfulness and prayer. If he himself found difficulties from the weakness of the flesh, he might well conclude how unsteady his disciples would be when their trial should come. So that the words of the text seem rather founded on what our Saviour experienced in his late agony, than on any thing criminal in his disciples: this point enlarged on.

The text, thus explained, contains an exhortation very suitable to the season when it was spoken, and to all men in general; and affords us a powerful excitement to pray continually for the assistance of God's holy spirit to aid our good resolutions.

But this explication of the text, how worthy soever of its author, and agreeable to the circumstances under which it was delivered, will not easily be digested; because it undermines the favorite doctrine of sins of infirmity, which, on the slender encouragement of this text, has wonderfully thriven, ridding men of all the trouble and pains of repentance and amendment, by easing them of the terrors of guilt.

The text, when used to this purpose, is thus explained: the disciples are supposed to have committed some great fault, for which our Saviour rebukes them; but then checking himself, he makes this excuse for them, *The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak;* absolving them for sake of the willingness that was in them, and throwing all the blame and guilt of sin on the weakness of the flesh. But to make the most of this, the fault of the disciples was only that of falling asleep after long watching, which, like the indulgence of many other natural wants, was a very pardonable infirmity.

As some men of melancholic temperament have fancied every sin committed to be sin against the Holy Ghost, and themselves thereby rejected irrecoverably, so others of a different temper have reckoned all their sins to be sins of infirmity, and themselves secure from danger. The one set pay dear for their mistake in this world by their constant terrors: the other will have no reason to be proud of their contrivance in another. There is just as much good policy in this conceit, as in his, who shut his eyes and thought nobody could see him.

But the better to judge of this matter, it may be proper to inquire what are sins of infirmity, and what value there is in

the excuse. First then, it is considered what is the Scripture sense of infirmities: secondly, what sort of sins they are, which will admit of an excuse, because of the infirmity from which they proceed.

1. The state of human nature is such, as to be liable to many pains, diseases, and at last to death: and though all are not equally affected by these miseries, yet all are equally liable to them: this is the first and proper notion of infirmity; and in this sense Christ is said to bear our infirmities, being, as St. Paul says, crucified through weakness; that is, by the condition of his humanity.

But men are not more weak and imperfect in their bodies than in their minds; nor more exposed to bodily pains than to the impressions of sin, which is our spiritual disease; and though all are not sinners alike, yet all are alike weak and subject to the temptation of sin: and this is the general sense of infirmity when applied to our spiritual condition. It is shown how St. Paul opposes the law of sin to the law of the spirit of life; and the condition of a person who was under the law of sin, in whom is the weakness of the flesh, to that of him who is under the law of life, in whom is the spirit of righteousness.

In his argument St. Paul more than once speaks thus: *If I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me:* which is thought by some to come very near to the case of sins of infirmity; for the excuse from infirmity is made up of willingness and want of power. In all moral actions there is a proportion between the ability to perform, and the guilt of not performing; but if we consider ourselves as Christians, who do not depend solely on our own strength, but likewise on the assistance of God, the terms of the proportion will be altered, and the guilt of our disobedience will be measured by the ability we *might have had* to perform our

duty: if we had not power to withstand temptations, this want of power may have been our own fault; and the not observing this is the true foundation of men's reliance on the excuse of infirmity: this point enlarged on.

Next to this general sense of infirmity come the particular infirmities included in it. As every disease of the body is called an infirmity, (for our Saviour, when he healed the sick of their particular distempers, is said to have cured their infirmities,) so by the same analogy, every particular sin may be called an infirmity. Thus David, speaking of his distrust of God's goodness, calls it his infirmity. So in the Epistle to the Hebrews it is said, *The law maketh men high priests which have infirmities.* But in the Scripture it is no where used in this sense as an alleviation of guilt.

The sense indeed of Scripture is the least thing regarded in setting up this plea of infirmity, which has been invented and used to shelter particular and darling sins; but seldom or never for the universal imperfection of all, even the best of our actions, in which sense only it can be reasonably used. But the bosom sin is to be defended: in which case two things are generally urged, a natural passion, and the violence of the passion: the passion is said to have the same author with nature; and its violence is excused by particular constitution and temperament: but what sin may not be thus permitted?

The Scripture uses weakness, in another sense, opposed to knowlege; as *weak Christians* are those newly converted, and not yet confirmed in the knowlege and mysteries of Christianity: but this sense is nothing to our purpose: neither is that of weakness as applied to those who have tender consciences, easily offended, such as those who scrupled to eat meat which had been offered to idols.

These are the most usual, if not all the Scripture senses of infirmity; but some of these have enough in them to be an

excuse for sin. All sin is weakness: it was our weakness that made it necessary for the Son of God to rescue us from the law of sin and death: and to what purpose is the Holy Spirit promised or given, but to overcome our infirmities, that the strength of God *may be made perfect in weakness?*

But after all we cannot be perfect. St. James says, *in many things we offend all.* How shall these errors be excused, to which the best men are liable? This will be answered if we consider,

Secondly, what sort of sins they are which admit the excuse. And here we are not to expect a catalogue of sins: for no kind of sin can be otherwise excused than by repentance and amendment; and at best there is an impropriety of speech in *sins of infirmity.* The necessary effects of our infirmities are not sinful: where they are not necessary, they may be sinful; but why they are called sins of infirmity, in distinction to other sins, is hard to say. There is an imperfection in the obedience of the best men; but without question God will favorably look on their failings, and accept their sincere though not perfect obedience. But the common notion of sins of infirmity gains nothing by this; for let any one say, what is the sin of infirmity that all good men are guilty of. There is an imperfection which flows from the weakness of our present state, and shows itself in various instances. Thus many good Christians complain of a coldness sometimes in their devotion, and of wandering thoughts: others are troubled with evil thoughts, unworthy conceptions of God and Christ; and they suffer great torment and anxiety of mind because of them: but such are objects of compassion to God and man; and their infirmities are so far from forming an excuse, that they are an aggravation of the guilt of others, who have not the same obedience and virtues to plead for themselves.

Since then there is so little reason to depend on this excuse,

though all stand in need of it, there remains only one way of intitling ourselves to the plea, which is, sincerely and universally to endeavor to obey God's will: we shall then be in the number of those whose infirmities, for the sake of Christ, shall be forgiven.

DISCOURSE XLI.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XXVI.—VERSE 41.

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

For the better understanding of these words, I must desire you to reflect a little on what occasion they were spoken, and in what circumstances our Saviour was when he made this exhortation to his disciples. The time of his crucifixion was now near at hand, and he had foretold his disciples that they should all be offended because of him; on which St Peter made a very forward profession of constancy, as did likewise all the disciples. But it does not appear that they clearly understood our Saviour, or were apprehensive that they should so soon lose their Master; if they had, they could not have been so supinely negligent and unconcerned for his welfare, as immediately to fall asleep, as we read they did. But our Saviour, as he had a different sense of what he was to undergo, so was he differently affected: he began to be sorrowful and very heavy; and expressed himself to his disciples, 'that his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.' He began to feel the weakness and infirmities of human nature on the approach of death, and the terror and apprehension of it increased so fast, as to draw that petition from him, 'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.' In which prayer he was so earnest, and his agony so great, that the 'sweat fell from him like drops of blood.'

No one was ever more willing to fulfil the will of God than he was: he came into the world to do the will of his Father, and was ready to finish the work set before him. But yet, in this last and sharp trial, he found how great the weakness of

the flesh was, and how powerful impressions it had on him: from whence probably arose the reflexion mentioned in the text, 'The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak;' which he makes the ground of his exhortation to his disciples, 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.' When he returned from prayer to them, he found them asleep, and, after expostulating with them for the unconcernedness it betrayed towards him in his distress and affliction, he exhorts them rather to employ their time in watching and praying; for though they had made a very forward and bold resolution rather to die with him than deny him, yet he knew that a resolution and willingness to obey were not a sufficient support against the weakness of human nature, but that they stood in need of all the advantages that might be reaped from watchfulness and prayer. If he himself found difficulties from the weakness of the flesh, he might well conclude how unable his disciples would be, when their time of trial should come. So that the words of the text, 'The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,' seem rather founded on what our Saviour experienced in his late agony, than from any thing that was criminal in his disciples. They were asleep indeed, which was an unkind part when they saw in how great distress their Master was, but otherwise it was not faulty in itself. They did not apprehend the imminent danger their Lord was in; if they had, their fear and anxiety would have interposed to disturb their rest. Nor did our Saviour blame their sleep otherwise than as unseasonable at that time, when the danger that attended them required them to be otherwise employed. There was a great storm ready to break, in which he foresaw they must bear a part as well as himself; and therefore there was a necessity they should arm and prepare themselves against it. 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation:' which is a warning for them to strengthen themselves against future evil; and he does not much blame their carriage as yet, but rather tacitly acknowleges the great forwardness they expressed to suffer with him and for him: 'The spirit indeed is willing.' But then he knew the greatness of the temptation they were to undergo, and had lately himself experienced the weakness and

inability of human nature, and therefore recommends watchfulness and prayer to them, because 'the flesh is weak.'

The words thus explained contain a very proper and suitable exhortation to the season in which they were spoken, and to all men in general: and the reason of them is a powerful excitement to us to pray continually for the grace and assistance of God's good Spirit, knowing, how ready and willing soever we may be to obey, that we are beset with too many and too strong enemies to permit us long to continue in our good resolutions; which should make us look about for help, and, if I may so speak, enter into new alliances with heaven for greater supplies of spiritual strength to oppose the common enemy of mankind.

But this explication of the text, how worthy soever of its Author, and agreeable to the circumstances in which it was delivered, will not easily be digested; because it undermines the foundation of the favorite doctrine of sins of infirmity, which, on the slender encouragement of this text of Scripture, has thriven wonderfully, almost to the exclusion of all other sins out of the world. For men are very willing to list all their sins under the colors of infirmity, and so leave them to shift for themselves: which, whatever else it signifies, has this present effect, it rids them of the trouble and pains of repentance and amendment, and eases them of the terror and apprehension of guilt, which would otherwise be very unwelcome companions to the pleasures of sin.

The text, when used to this purpose, is thus explained: the disciples are supposed to have committed some great fault, for which our Saviour rebukes them; 'What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation:' but then, checking himself, he makes this excuse for them, 'The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak:' absolving them for the willingness that was in them, and throwing all the blame and guilt of sin on the weakness of the flesh. Now to make the most of this: the fault which the disciples were guilty of could be no other than falling asleep, and that after long and tedious watching; so that if the weakness of the flesh was applied as an excuse to the Apostle's case, nothing

else can be understood by it but the natural wants and cravings of nature, which are necessary to the support of life; such as sleepiness, hunger and thirst, which no one doubts but may be so strong, without any fault of ours, as to interrupt us when we might be better employed; and whenever they are so, are without question very pardonable infirmities. But if this were the only use made of this notion, no one would think it worthy of a dispute.

But as some men of melancholic tempers and dispositions have fancied every sin they have been guilty of to be the sin against the Holy Ghost, and themselves irrecoverably rejected, and incapable of the mercy and favor of God; so others of a different temper have reckoned all their sins to be sins of infirmity, and themselves secure enough from the anger of God and danger of punishment. The one pays dear for his mistake in this world, by the fears and apprehensions under which he continually suffers: and the other will have no reason to be proud of his contrivance, when his error comes to be rectified by the impartial judgment of God in another. It is a false security men gain to themselves by these little shifting tricks in religion; and there is just as much policy in this conceit, as in his who shut his own eyes fast, and thought nobody else could see him. For however men darken and blind their own judgment, there is who sees through all their pretences, and will judge a righteous judgment.

But the better to enable us to judge of this matter, it may be proper to inquire what are sins of infirmity, and what value there is in the excuse. And though there is no ground in the words of the text for this distinction, yet, since they have been so often applied to this purpose, I hope it will not be thought an unseasonable deviation to endeavor to rectify the mistakes in this case, which are but too general, and of too fatal consequence to the souls of men.

In this inquiry I shall confine myself to the following method:

First, to consider what is the Scripture sense of infirmities.

Secondly, what sort of sins they are, which will admit of an excuse, because of the infirmity from which they proceed.

The state of human nature is such, as to be liable to many pains, diseases, and at last to death: and though all are not equally affected, some having a less share of these evils than others, yet all, by the weakness of nature, are equally liable and exposed to these miseries: this is the first and proper notion of infirmity. In this sense Christ is said 'to bear our infirmities;' being, by the necessary law of his human nature, subject to the like miseries and afflictions with us. St. Paul says, 'he was crucified through weakness;' that is, he was by the condition of his humanity liable to death, which exposed him to the death of the cross, through the malice and power of his enemies. Under this sense are contained, as particulars in a general, all the natural wants and weaknesses of nature; such as hunger, thirst, sleepiness, the fear and dread of pain, and the aversion and horror of death: which infirmity our blessed Saviour himself was not free from, as appears by what has been already said.

But men are not more weak and imperfect in their bodies than in their minds, nor more exposed to bodily pains than to the impressions of sin, which is our spiritual disease: and though all are not sinners alike, yet all are alike weak, and subject to the temptations of sin: and this is the general sense of infirmity, when applied to our spiritual condition. St. Paul tells us, 'the law was weak through the flesh:' and the author to the Hebrews to the same sense, 'There was a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof: for the law made nothing perfect.' Which is not to be understood, as if the law was weak, carnal, and unprofitable, considered in itself; for St. Paul says, 'the law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good:' but men were so weak and carnally minded, the disposition to evil was so great, for which the law had not provided a sufficient cure, that the holy, just, and good commandment was made ineffectual. Agreeable to this, St. Paul, in the person of an unregenerate man, says, 'The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin; for in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.' This, and more to the same purpose, you will find in Rom. vii. This incapacity St. Paul

calls 'the law of sin which is in the members,' which rules and governs in the unregenerate, and from which we are freed by Christ, as he immediately declares: 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' So that now the weakness of the flesh is done away, and we, having received the Spirit of life and of Christ, must fulfil the righteousness of the law; and may, if we walk according to the Spirit we have received. Nothing is plainer than that St. Paul opposes the law of sin, and the law of the Spirit of life; and the condition of him who was under the law of sin, in whom is the weakness of the flesh, and of him who is under the law of life, in whom is the Spirit of righteousness. Yet some will have St. Paul speak in his own person without a figure, that is, in the person of a regenerate Christian, when he describes the state of the law of sin; and have learned to make grace and sin consistent, and taught that grace once received can never be effaced by actual sins, of what number or quality soever, or the sinner made less the child of God. A doctrine, of which it is hard to say, whether it has less of Christianity or common sense.

In this argument St. Paul more than once speaks thus: 'If I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me;' which is thought by some to come very near to the case of sins of infirmity: for the excuse from infirmity is made up of willingness and want of power; willingness to obey, and want of power to withstand the temptations and powerful impressions of sin. In all moral actions there is a proportion between the ability to perform, and the guilt of not performing; and the one must be estimated by the other: but if we consider ourselves as Christians, who do not depend purely on our own strength, but likewise on the assistance of God, the measure of which depends on the application we use to obtain it, the terms of the proportion will be altered, and the guilt of our disobedience will be measured by the ability we might have had to perform our duty. For, if we fail in

ability through our own default in using the means prescribed by God to enable us, the guilt of our sins will be according to the ability we might have had; and therefore the excuse may be true, and yet insignificant. It may be true that you had not power to withstand the temptations you fell under; and yet this may be no justification, because it was your own fault that you had not power: the not observing which is the true foundation of men's relying so much for excuse on their infirmities. They are conscious to themselves how violent the temptation to sin was, and how much it overpowered their strength; on which they ground their excuse: but then they leave out of the consideration, how much more strength they might have had, if they had not neglected the means of obtaining it. St. Paul tells us, 'We are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in us;' and therefore we shall be judged, not according to the strength of the flesh, but of the Spirit, which we have, or may have, if it be not our own fault. A man may as justly be punished for not being able to perform his duty, when he had it in his own hands to make himself able, as for not doing his duty when he was able. And there is not much difference between these two; for it is one part of our duty to enable ourselves to perform our duty, and all the consequences of our weakness and infirmity are justly chargeable on the neglect of it. This is but little more than what all moralists have agreed in the case of vicious habits: it is hardly to be imagined, how great a necessity an ill habit brings us under; yet no man ever urged this as an argument to excuse sin; but thought the first neglect in suffering the habit to grow up, intitled men very justly to the guilt of all the sin consequent on it. If we know how to remedy our infirmities, why do we still boast of them, or place our security in them? St. Paul complains of a 'thorn given him in the flesh,' for the removal of which he thrice prayed; to which he had no other answer from the Lord, than, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' On which St. Paul triumphed and gloried in his infirmity. But how? Not as we glory in our infirmities, using them as an excuse for sin; but, 'because through his infirmity the power of Christ rested on him.' The law of the

Spirit of life having then so plentifully provided against this weakness and depravity of the flesh, there can no longer any color of excuse be had from it.

Next to this general sense of infirmity come the particular infirmities included in it. As every disease of the body is called an infirmity, as our Saviour, when he healed the sick of their particular distempers, is said to cure their infirmities; so, by the same analogy, every particular sin may be called an infirmity. Thus David, speaking of his distrust of God's goodness, calls it his 'infirmity.' So the author to the Hebrews, speaking of the Jewish high priests, says, 'The law maketh men high priests which have infirmities.' But in the Scripture it is no where used in this sense as an alleviation of guilt.

But the sense of Scripture is the least thing regarded in setting up this plea of infirmity, which has been invented and used to shelter some particular darling sins, and seldom or never for the universal imperfection of all, even the best of our actions, in which sense only it can be reasonably used; but that men think not worth excusing. The bosom sin is the thing to be defended: in which case two things are generally urged, a natural passion, and the violence of the passion. A natural passion has the same author with nature, and belongs to us as we are men, and therefore not to be avoided. For the violence of the passion, the particular constitution and temperament of the body are alleged, which expose some more to this or that passion than others perhaps are liable to. But it is the misfortune of some arguments to prove too much, and, like an arrow too strongly drawn, miss the mark by going beyond it. What sin is there that may not thus be excused? St. Paul reckons among the works of the flesh, 'adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and the like;' then adds, 'they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.' Now try these round, they all immediately, or by consequence, arise from passions which are called natural, and, as they meet with a suitable temper, some may prevail in one, some in another; and then either the excuse is vain, or the Apostle's judgment is vain, that 'they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.'

The Scripture uses weakness in another sense, as opposed to knowlege; as 'weak Christians' are those newly converted, and not yet confirmed in the knowlege and mysteries of Christianity: but this sense is nothing to our purpose.

So likewise weakness is applied to them who have weak and tender consciences, easily offended, who scrupled eating meat offered to idols, the use of which the Apostle allows to such as had sense enough not to be offended at it. Their infirmity was a nice and scrupulous fear of sin, where there was no reason to fear: a weakness we are pretty well got over.

These are the most usual, if not all the Scripture senses of infirmity; and I think it appears that none of them have infirmity enough in them to be an excuse for sin. All sin is weakness; the more perfect any creature is, and the nearer it approaches to Him who is all perfection, the more remote is it from a possibility of sinning. It was our weakness made it necessary for the Son of God to come to our assistance, to rescue us from the law of sin and death; which he did by condemning sin in the flesh, and by the powerful effusion of his Holy Spirit. But to what purpose is the Holy Spirit promised or given, but to overcome our infirmities, that the strength of God may be 'made perfect in weakness?'

But yet, after all these helps, we are not nor cannot be perfect creatures. St. James says, 'In many things we offend all.' How shall these errors be excused, which the best of men are liable to? Is there a foundation for an excuse, or must all alike perish in the error of their ways? This will receive an answer, if we consider,

Secondly, what sort of sins they are which will admit of an excuse, because of the infirmity from which they proceed.

And here you are not to expect a catalogue of sins, for I know no kind of sin that can be otherwise excused than by repentance and amendment; and at best there is an impropriety of speech in sins of infirmity. The necessary effects of our infirmities are not sinful: where they are not necessary, they may be sinful; but why they are called sins of infirmity in distinction to other sins, is hard to say. There is an imperfection in the obedience of the best of men. The five wise virgins slumbered, and their lamps grew dim, and wanted trimming, when the bride-

groom came; but yet they soon made ready, and were received to the marriage-feast: and without question, God will favorably look on the failings of good men, and accept their sincere though not perfect obedience. This, I hope, we have reason to allow: but yet the common notion of sins of infirmity gains nothing by it; for let any one say what is the sin of infirmity that all good men are guilty of. There is an imperfection which flows from the weakness of our present condition, and shows itself, not regularly, but in various instances. Many good Christians have complained of a coldness sometimes in their devotion, and of wandering and roving thoughts; which is, without doubt, one of those weaknesses that shall be forgiven to pious and sincere Christians. Will you then make this one of your sins of infirmity, an evil that carries its excuse always with it? Surely no: for though it shall be forgiven some, it will be an aggravation of the guilt of others, who have not the same sincere obedience and good disposition to plead in their excuse. Some are troubled with impious and blasphemous thoughts, unworthy conceptions of God and Christ, and suffer a prodigious torment and anxiety of mind because of them, who are objects of pity and compassion both to God and man: and when this is the case of well-disposed persons, who are no ways consenting to them, there seems to be as little guilt in them as in a fever or an ague.

On the whole then, since there is so little reason to depend on this excuse, and since all men in some degree stand in need of it, I will show you the way, and I know but one way, of intitling ourselves to this plea, which is, by endeavoring sincerely and universally to obey the will of God; then shall we be in the number of those whose infirmities, for the sake of Christ, shall be forgiven.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XLII.

ISAIAH, CHAP. LIII.—VERSE 3.

Our Saviour's words, *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves,* may be very properly applied by us, to direct our devotion on the day of his crucifixion: it is a day of sorrow and mourning, not for his sake, who is crowned with honor and glory; but for us, whose sins occasioned him to suffer. The consideration of his unbounded love towards us, and our own carelessness and indifference in availing ourselves of the salvation purchased by his sufferings, will show us where the true cause of our grief lies, and that instead of venting our indignation against the ancient crucifiers of our Saviour, we ought to turn it against ourselves, who are daily *crucifying him afresh.* The reflexions suggested by the description in the text, will teach us to admire the unbounded goodness of our Redeemer, and to *weep only for ourselves.* The prophecy in the text remarkable as containing a general description of Christ's condition during his abode on earth. The great goodness of God in warning us by the spirit of prophecy of the mean appearance of our Redeemer is shown: his poverty thus became a proof of his authority; and had he not in the lowness of his condition answered his description in the text, we could not have believed him to be the glorious Redeemer foretold by Isaiah, to be *despised and rejected of men.* A consideration of Christ's sufferings therefore is calculated not only to increase our love, but to strengthen our faith. Our attention is called to three points on this subject: I. God's wisdom and goodness in sending his son into the world in a state of poverty and

affliction: II. the evidence of prophecy, that he should so appear in the fulness of time: III. the historical evidence that he did so appear, and that in him the prophecies were fulfilled. I. The sufferings of Christ are often insisted on by the sacred writers as an evidence of God's mercy towards mankind: see Rom. viii. 32. and v. 8; also 1st Ep. of John iii. 16., and our Saviour's own words in John xv. 13. Though we may not be able to see clearly the reasons that made it necessary for Christ to die that the world might live, yet it is plain his sufferings were on our account; and they show how much our salvation was the care of heaven: it would therefore argue great perverseness of mind, if, hardening our hearts against this goodness, we should busy ourselves with curious inquiries into the hidden mysteries of Providence, and shut our eyes and hearts against the impressions of his love and of our duty. That God's goodness is made plain to us in the death of Christ, is the only knowlege requisite for our salvation; and if we would be encouraged in the practice of virtue by the hope of God's aid, or be comforted in repentance by his promise to receive us, we may learn to reason of St. Paul, Rom. viii. 32. Our knowlege therefore is clear and distinct, as far as we are concerned to go. Many wise ends of Providence are to be discerned by a consideration of Christ's sufferings with respect to ourselves. First, with regard to his being a teacher, his sufferings set him above the reach of suspicions. Our Lord and his disciples met with nothing but misery and affliction. Had he come as a temporal prince, we might have suspected his cunning and policy; but the gospel now stands clear of this objection. Secondly, with regard to our Lord's being an example of holiness and obedience, set before us for our instruction and imitation, his sufferings render the pattern perfect: had he lived in worldly prosperity, the example of his virtues, however conspicuous, would have extended but a little way. The poor, though they might have upbraided the rich

for not following his example, would have thought their poverty a sufficient excuse for not attempting it themselves: but now there is no pretence left for any mortal. Thirdly, with regard to his divine mission, his sufferings were an evident token that the hand of God was with him. He only can confound the mighty things of the world by things of no account; and we have here the instance of a weak poor man, oppressed by a whole nation, and yet enabled to withstand it: yet when his time was come, he fell an easy victim. Had the prophets foretold that a great man should do great things, at his appearance it might have been doubted whether he was the person foretold, or whether his deeds were not the common effect of that might and power with which he was armed: but when they declared that these mighty deeds should be accomplished by our Saviour in his character described by the text, no doubt could arise. Our Lord would easily be distinguished by the greatness of his works and the meanness of his condition; and this leads, II. to the consideration of the evidence of prophecy concerning the mean appearance which our Lord was to make. The 53rd chapter of Isaiah so fully describes this part of our Saviour's character, that it looks more like a history than a prophecy; yet it was in being long before our Lord was born, and was in the keeping of his enemies, who were at once the preservers and the fulfillers of it: yet contrast this with the description before given of him in Isaiah ix. 6. and again in liii. 11., and how are we to reconcile these contradictions? It is answered, that we must search the gospel: there we shall find our Lord despised and rejected of men, persecuted and afflicted, yet rising to honor and glory; ascending to the glory of his Father, giving gifts unto men, and leading captivity captive. III. The historical evidence for the completion of these prophecies relating to the calamitous condition of our blessed Redeemer, is considered. The way was prepared before he was born: his conception led to

it: and so it proved. The mighty Prince of Peace made his first appearance in a manger: his life was sought after as soon as he was born, and his parents were obliged to fly with him into banishment to save it. His youth was spent in the difficulties of poverty, and during his ministry he had not where to lay his head. The unbelieving Jews, when he healed the sick, cast out devils, or forgave sins, accused him of the greatest crimes. As the time of his being offered up drew near, all things conspired to make his death bitter and terrifying. He was betrayed by one of his chosen twelve, and the rest after his agony forsook him. He was afterwards carried to judgment, mocked, buffeted, spit on; and a murderer was chosen to be released in his stead: *thus was he despised and rejected of men;* but neither the pangs of the cross, his mental sufferings, nor the malice and scorn of his crucifiers, made him for one moment forget his love and tenderness towards them: with his latest breath he begged for their forgiveness. We must now close this scene, and ask with the Psalmist, *what reward shall I give unto the Lord?* &c. Let us also answer in his words: *I will receive the cup of salvation, and call on his name.* We have nothing to return but our love and obedience. Let us not again crucify Christ by our iniquities, but let us arise to a new life of righteousness in him; that *when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we may also appear with him in glory.*

DISCOURSE XLII.

ISAIAH, CHAP. LIII.—VERSE 3.

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

When our Lord was led away to be crucified, and the women bewailed and lamented his misery, he turned about to them, and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves;' words which we may very properly apply to ourselves for the direction of our devotion on this day of his crucifixion: a day it is of sorrow and mourning, but not for his sake, who, crowned with glory and honor, is set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; but for our own, whose sins brought down this load of woe and of misery on our blessed Redeemer. If we consider with how unbounded a love he embraced us in our lowest state of weakness, and with how cool an affection we daily approach to him; how much he gladly endured on our account, and how unwillingly we suffer any thing on his; if we reflect how earnestly he labored to save our souls, and how carelessly and wantonly we throw them away; what pains and sorrows he underwent to perfect our redemption, and to what empty pleasures we sacrifice all his sufferings, and our own eternal happiness, it will show us where the true cause of our grief lies, and how vainly we compliment our Lord, by venting our indignation against his ancient crucifiers, which ought to be spent on ourselves, who are daily renewing his shame, and 'crucifying him afresh.'

Whilst therefore I represent unto you this scene of woe, and endeavor to place before you 'this man of sorrow, acquainted with grief,' let every Christian heart supply this necessary admonition, All this he suffered for my sake: then cast one look

on yourselves, and see how you have deserved all this love: this will teach you how to divide your affections, to admire and adore the unbounded goodness of your Redeemer, and to lament and weep only for yourselves.

Many prophecies there are relating to our Lord, which regard only some particular actions and circumstances of his life; but this in the text points at no single calamity that befel him, but is a general description of his condition during his abode on earth: it begins at his cradle, and ends with his cross, pursuing him in every step, and discovers to us the Son of God through the darkest veil of sorrow and affliction.

'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world:' in wisdom he ordained them all, and in mercy he has revealed some of them to the children of men. How gracious was it in him to forewarn the world by the spirit of prophecy of the mean appearance of their Redeemer, that their faith might be armed against the reproach and contempt which attended his poverty, and the great scandal of his cross! In human reckoning a mean condition bespeaks a mean man; but here the case is otherwise: for when God had foretold the mean appearance of his Son, his poverty became a proof of his authority, and the lowness of his condition showed the excellency of his person. He was 'a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;' and had he not been so, we could never have believed him to be that glorious Redeemer, who, as the spirit of prophecy foretold, should be 'despised and rejected of men.' The consideration therefore of our Saviour's sufferings is not only an argument to inflame our love, but to strengthen our faith likewise; showing as well that he is our Redeemer, as how much he underwent for the sake of our redemption.

There are three things then which may deserve your attention in this subject:

First, the wisdom and goodness of God in determining to send his Son into the world in a state of poverty and affliction.

Secondly, the evidence of prophecy, that he should so appear in the fulness of time.

Thirdly, the historical evidence, that he did so appear, and that in him the prophecies had their completion.

First, the wisdom and goodness of God in determining to send his Son into the world in a state of poverty and affliction.

The sufferings of Christ we find often insisted on by the sacred writers, as an evidence of the mercy of God towards mankind. Thus St. Paul: 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' And again: 'God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.' So likewise St. John: 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.' This indeed was a great demonstration of his love; for as our blessed Lord himself hath told us, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' Were it then ever so hard to render an account of Christ's sufferings to the inquisitive, to the reasoners of this world; yet, since it is plain his sufferings were on our account, if we consider them as an argument of God's goodness, and our Redeemer's love to us, it stands clear of all difficulties whatever, and plainly speaks how much our salvation was the care of heaven. Perhaps we cannot see the reasons that made it necessary for Christ to die, that the world might live: but this we certainly know, that if Christ died that the world might live, he had an exceeding great tenderness for the world, and we are bound to him in the strictest bonds of gratitude and love. And since this scene lies so open to our view, it shows great perverseness of mind, and a base ungenerous disposition, to shut our eyes on it, and to harden our hearts against the impressions of so much kindness, and to amuse ourselves with curious inquiries into the hidden reason of this mysterious love. What is it that your Lord requires of you, but to love and to obey him? What greater inducement can you have to both than this, that he first loved you, and laid down his life for you? Could you give ten thousand reasons for the expediency of his so doing, yet still your love and your obedience would stand on the same bottom, that Christ died that you might live. What purpose then of religion would it serve, to know these hidden things of God? Knowlege will save no man. And who would not choose rather to be found in the number of the most ignorant lovers of Christ and of his word, than among the profoundest inquirers into the secret mysteries

of Providence? Would you see the goodness of God? Nothing plainer, Christ died for you. Would you encourage yourself in the practice of virtue by the expectation of God's assistance and favor? or would you comfort yourself in your repentance, and be glad to know that God will receive you, if you return from the evil of your ways?—go, learn to reason of St. Paul: 'If God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how will he not with him also freely give us all things?'

Thus far then, that is, as far as we are concerned to go, our knowlege is clear and distinct, and the sufferings of Christ afford us such an argument for love and obedience, as the weakest man must understand, and the wisest must adore.

But farther: though we cannot enter into the hidden wisdom of God, and see the reasons which made it necessary for Christ to suffer; yet if we consider his sufferings with respect to ourselves, we may discern many wise ends of Providence in this dispensation.

First, with regard to his being a teacher, his sufferings set him above the reach of suspicions. What ends could he have to serve by his doctrine, who met with nothing but misery and affliction as the reward of his labor? Religions, we know, have been instituted to serve the ends of policy, and new kingdoms have sprung out of new doctrines: thus the empire and Alcoran of Mahomet have the same date. But what room is there for these jealousies with respect to the Christian religion? what advantage did Christ or his followers make of the gospel? The Master lived in poverty, and the disciples in distress: he ended his life on the cross, they theirs by sundry kinds of death. Nor was he disappointed in meeting with this usage; he knew before that it was ordained for him; and it was one great part of his business to prepare his disciples to follow his example, by acquainting them long before of the afflictions which both he and they were to endure. Some perhaps will suspect there was no wisdom in this; and all I think must own that there was no worldly wisdom in it. Had our Lord come in the form of a temporal prince, surrounded with power and majesty, often had we heard before now of his cunning and his policy, and been told that our religion was more nearly allied to this world than

the other. But now the gospel stands clear of all these objections, from which perhaps nothing could have purged it but the blood of its divine Author.

Secondly, with regard to our Lord's being an example of holiness and obedience, set before us for our instruction and imitation. His sufferings render the pattern perfect, and show his virtues in their truest lustre, and at the same time silence the pleas which laziness or self-love would otherwise have suggested. Had he lived in worldly prosperity, and found all things easy about him, let his virtues have been ever so conspicuous, his example would have been extended but a little way. Perhaps poor men, and unfortunate, would have upbraided the rich and prosperous for not following the copy set before them; but they would have thought their own hard circumstances a sufficient excuse for not attempting it. But what pretence is there now left for any mortal? Are you more wretched than your Master? are you poor, and therefore discontented? Look to him, who had not where to lay his head, and yet was easy, and paid a cheerful obedience to his God. Are you provoked by ill usage to forget the peaceful duties of charity? Are you hurried to revenge by uncommon injuries? and can you at the same time think yourself a disciple of the blessed Jesus, who even on the cross, and under the bitter agonies of death, prayed for his persecutors, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?'

Thirdly, with regard to his divine mission. His sufferings were an evident token that the hand of God was with him: he only can produce strength out of weakness, and knows how to confound the mighty things of the world by things which are of no account. Power, we know, especially if attended with happy incidents, can produce great things; but a weak poor man is so easily oppressed, that this before us is perhaps the only instance in which a whole nation ever rose to suppress one. And what was it that enabled him to withstand the rage of the people, and the malice of the priests, supported by the power of the government? When his life was sought, he was hid in the midst of the crowd, and was covered with darkness at noon-day; but when his time was come, he fell an easy victim: but his death, like Samson's, was more victorious than his

life; in this only it differed, Samson by his death destroyed his enemies, but the enemies of Christ were by his death redeemed.

Add to this the evidence of prophecy, which is so much the stronger, by how much the weaker Christ was: so admirably has the wisdom of God displayed itself in this mystery of faith. Had the prophets foretold that a great man should do great things; whenever that great man had come, it might have been doubted whether he was the person foretold, and whether his mighty deeds were not the common effects of such might and power as he was armed with; but when the prophets declared that all they foretold should be accomplished by a mean and wretched man, oppressed with sorrow, and worn out with grief; this was a case that could not be mistaken, hardly two such men should come; and whenever he came, he would be easily distinguished by the greatness of his works, and the meanness of his condition. And this leads me to consider,

Secondly, the evidence of prophecy concerning the mean appearance our Lord was to make.

I shall not need to carry you far in search of this evidence; the chapter of the text alone is so full a description of this part of our Saviour's character, that it looks more like a history than a prophecy, and may with more reason be suspected to be a copy drawn from his life, than not to be a description of it. Yet this Scripture was in being long before our Lord was born, was in the keeping of his enemies, of those who hated and despised him, and at last put him to a cruel death, and were at once the preservers and the fulfillers of this prophecy. Here you find him represented as void of 'form and of comeliness;' as having 'no beauty that we should desire him;' one 'despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;' from whom 'we hid as it were our faces; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.' Yet this is he, of whom before the Prophet had prophesied: 'Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be on his shoulder; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace: of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end on the throne of David, and on his

kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment, and with justice, from henceforth even for ever.' What enigmas are these? Shall he be a mighty prince, and yet despised and rejected of men? Shall he be encompassed with the glories of David's throne, and yet be void of form and of comeliness? Shall he reign for ever, and establish justice and judgment for evermore, and shall he yet be taken from prison, and cut off from the land of the living? Where can these contradictions meet, and in what manner of person can they be reconciled? But to go on: after this general description of his low estate, the Prophet proceeds to point out some of the most remarkable calamities of his life. He was not only despised and rejected, but he 'was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of the people he was stricken.' And yet he 'had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief. His soul was an offering for sin.' And yet after this, when the Prophet had killed and buried him, he adds, 'He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. By his knowlege shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.' Where are we now? Must he die a wretched death, and be numbered with the transgressors; and yet shall he prolong his days, and see the work of the Lord prosper in his hands? How shall we clear these things? Look into the gospel, and there you will find the scene opening apace: there you will find your Lord despised and rejected of men, persecuted and afflicted, and put to a cruel death and open shame, and yet rising to glory and honor. There you may see this prisoner of the grave ascending to the glory of his Father, giving gifts unto men, and leading captivity captive.

Let us then, in the last place, consider the historical evidence we have for the completion of these prophecies, which describe the calamitous condition of our blessed Redeemer.

The way was prepared before he was born. His conception led to it; since the meanness of his parentage could promise nothing for the child but labor and sorrow: and so it proved.

This mighty Prince of Peace made his first appearance in a manger; and we may well suppose the other conveniencies he met, on his first coming into the world, were answerable to this. No sooner was he born but his life was sought after: the distressed parents fly their country, and the child is carried into banishment, before he knew to distinguish between good and evil. His youth was spent in the difficulties of poverty, and his hands employed in the works of it; and when the time came that he was to be made known unto Israel, and stood forth in the power of the Lord, confirming his doctrine with mighty signs and wonders, the opposition to him increased, and every act of charity he did to others brought new sorrow and misery to himself. During this time, in which he went about doing good, 'he had not,' as he himself has told us, 'where to lay his head.' When he cast out devils, he was immediately charged to be in league with the prince of them. When he healed the sick of their infirmities, and forgave their sins, then he was a blasphemer, an incroacher on the prerogative of God. When he restored the withered hand, and cured the lame or the blind on the Sabbath-day, then he was no longer fit to live: these were such offences, as nothing but his death could expiate. Consider what he suffered, and he was the lowest of the sons of men: consider what he did, and he appears, as he truly was, to be the Son of God.

But still there remains behind the gloomiest scene of sorrow. When the powers of darkness prevailed, and the time of his being offered up drew near, all things conspired to make his death bitter and terrifying. In his life he had chosen twelve to be his constant companions, and they at least adhered to him, and willingly partook in his afflictions: but now one of these bosom-friends conspires his ruin, and sells him for thirty pieces of silver. The rest, though they were guilty of no such baseness, yet proved no comfort in his distress.

As the danger drew near, our blessed Lord, who was in all things tempted like unto us, sin only excepted, felt the pangs of nature at the approach of death, and retired to prayer, the only support of an afflicted spirit. In this his grief he chose Peter and the sons of Zebedee to be his companions, that they

might watch with him in his sorrow: but even here they forsook him, and insensible of their Master's agony, fell asleep. They were soon awakened; but they awoke only to fly, and Christ was left alone. Peter followed, but it was afar off; and he only followed him to deny him. Thus betrayed, and thus forsaken, he is carried to judgment. When he is silent, he is reproached with sullenness: when he speaks, he is charged with blasphemy. Sometimes he is buffeted and spit on; by and by, in cruel sport, they pay him the mock honors of a prince, he is crowned with thorns, has a reed put into his hand, and in derision he is saluted, 'Hail, King of the Jews.' And that nothing might be wanting to show how vile and contemptible he was to the people, the question was put between him and a murderer, which should be released; and with one voice the people answered, 'Release unto us Barabbas.' Thus was he 'despised and rejected of men.'

Follow him but one step farther, and you will find him hanging on the cross between two common robbers, groaning under the bitterest agonies of death. Nor yet can all this misery create in the lookers on any pity or compassion. See how they shake their heads, and say, 'Come down from the Cross, Son of God, come down, and we will believe thee.' But neither the pains of the cross, nor those pangs which drew from him that complaint 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!' nor all the malice and scorn of the crucifiers could make him one moment forget his love and tenderness towards them. You hear no complaint from him, no appeals made against them to a future judgment: instead of this, with his latest breath he pleads their cause, excuses their weakness, and begs for their pardon; 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

And here let us close this scene, and return to ourselves with this question. 'What reward shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?' Let us also answer for ourselves in the words of the Psalmist, 'I will receive the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord.' We have nothing to return but our love and obedience, and nothing else is required of us; 'he hath borne our griefs, and carried our

sorrows;' let us not call for them again by our iniquities: let them be buried for ever, but let us arise to a new life of righteousness in Christ Jesus, that 'when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we may also appear with him in glory.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XLIII.

COLOSSIANS, CHAP. III.—VERSE 1.

How much the metaphorical language of Scripture has been mistaken and abused is well known. The words of the text are not capable of being taken in the literal sense; for it is not possible to imagine that St. Paul should intend to tell the Colossians, or that they should believe him, that they lived no longer in the world, but were literally men raised from the dead. The words plainly are an inference from what had been before said, and refer to the doctrine in Coloss. ii. 10-13. For an explication of them it is necessary to consider the Scripture representation of the natural state and condition of man, and of his gospel state on his becoming a Christian. In the state of nature the Scripture represents men as in Eph. iv. 17. 18. ii. 2. 3. Rom. iv. 19. 20. And because the end of these things is death, this state of sin is also called a state of death, as in Eph. ii. 1. 5. Whilst men were thus dead to God and themselves, they lived only to sin and unrighteousness. The passions and affections were but the instruments of sin, and therefore are said to constitute the body of sin; that body over which sin had dominion, as in Rom. vi. 6. Coloss. ii. 11. The members of which this body is made up, are described Col. iii. 5. This body is called by St. Paul the body of death, as the state of sin is called the state of death, Rom. vii. 24. As the body, with the soul its director, constitutes the man, so these depraved appetites and affections, which are the instruments or members of sin, and which compose the body of sin, together with the evil principle directing them, are said in

Scripture to be the *old man;* the man which only lived before the regeneration by Christ Jesus: Rom. vi. 6. Eph. iv. 22.

This is the state of nature described in Scripture. It is plain that this old man, or man of sin, must be destroyed on the appearance of Christ Jesus, to make way for the Spirit of righteousness: thus to destroy the old man, and to restore the decayed image of God, what is it but to new-make the man, and by a second creation restore him to the privileges of the first, forfeited by sin? For this reason the Christian is said to be a new creature: 2 Cor. v. 17. Gal. iv. 23. 24. vi. 15. We are said-even to *put on* Christ, from the similitude of will and affections between Christ and his true members: Gal. iii. 27. From this account it is easy to understand the propriety of the words or phrases made use of to express these two conditions. We read that we were *dead* before the knowlege of Christ; that *we died* and *were buried with Christ:* again, *that we rose with Christ, and are alive in him.* The apparent inconsistency of these assertions may be reconciled by our taking the same view of man as the Scripture does. Man was created after the image of God; but on disobedience he became subject to sin. This then was the death of the man created after God's image, who lay buried under the ruins of sin and iniquity; and this was the death of the world before the knowlege of Christ. The life of the world at the coming of Christ was the life of sin, which he came to destroy: Gal. v. 24.; and we are said to *die with Christ* and to be *buried with him,* because we renounce that life. Thus dying to sin, we begin again to live unto God, and are therefore said to be made *alive in Christ, and to rise together with him.* This change, which we had no power even to wish for, was effected by Christ alone, who dying on the cross for all, all are said to be crucified with him: Heb. ii. 9. 2 Cor. v. 14. The way to attain to the benefits of Christ's death, as St. Paul tells us, is *to be conformable unto his death;* and to do this, we must put off the old man, and put

on the new man, who is created after righteousness. This St. Paul, Rom. vi., styles, *being planted in the likeness of his death, and in the likeness of his resurrection.* To this he refers, Rom. viii. 29. and Rom xiii. Many other places also must be opened with this key. The very essence of Christianity consists in this conformity with Christ; and therefore baptism, which is our admission to the gospel, is only a solemn taking on ourselves this conformity, as we learn from St. Paul, Rom. vi. To walk in newness of life is our conformity to the resurrection of Christ, which was to new life and glory: Rom. vi. 9-12. As the resurrection of Christ was to perpetual life, so our first resurrection must be perpetual holiness. This account of the Scripture language, and of the reasons on which it is founded, will make clear to us many otherwise intricate passages. For instance, when we read of two deaths and two resurrections, we shall understand the death of the body and the death unto sin; the resurrection to life eternal hereafter, and the resurrection to righteousness in this world. *I am crucified to the world,* says St. Paul, *and the world to me:* and St. John says, *whosoever is born of God,* that is, whoever has attained the new life through Christ, *overcometh the world.* St. Paul tells us that the Spirit of God will *quicken our mortal bodies,* as well as our dead bodies. This is not to be understood without referring to the first resurrection, as explained above; and again, Phil. iii. 10. 11. can be explained only by what has been said of our being made conformable to the death and resurrection of Christ, by rising to holiness and righteousness. The power of Christ's resurrection in producing good effects on those that feel it, is described in v. 20.; and is what the Apostle to the Hebrews calls, *tasting the powers of the world to come.* To understand St. Paul when he says, those that fall from their faith *crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to open shame,* we must have recourse to the Scripture representation as before explained.

By receiving the faith, we put on Christ, crucifying the old man and his deeds; by deserting the faith, returning to our former deeds, and again putting on the old man, we again crucify Christ with his deeds, and put him to open shame. The various expressions to this effect in the gospel are only to be understood by analogy to this notion. Our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ having been discussed, the Apostle in the text carries the metaphor still one degree higher; arguing that, since we are dead to the world, and alive to Christ through the Spirit of holiness, we must act like members of Christ, and set our affections on things above, where Christ our life is ascended: hence it is that St. Paul so often exclaims against the absurdity of a Christian's living in sin; for the Christian has crucified and buried the body of sin. How then, says he, *shall we who are dead to sin, continue any longer therein?* Sin alone has power to separate the Christian from his Saviour. Holiness is as necessary to our spiritual life as food to our natural life. How just therefore is the Apostle's conclusion in the text: *If we be risen with Christ,* that is, if we be with him, *we must seek the things which are above.*

DISCOURSE XLIII.

COLOSSIANS, CHAP. III.—VERSE 1.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

How much the metaphorical language of Scripture has been mistaken, and what errors and absurdities men have fallen into, under pretence of adhering to the literal sense, is well known. The words of the text are hardly capable of being so abused; for it is not possible to imagine that St. Paul should intend to tell the Colossians, or that the Colossians should believe him if he did, that they lived no longer in this world, but were, in the literal sense, men raised from the dead. But as our state and condition in this world is often set forth in the Scriptures in metaphorical language, it has not fared so well in all parts of it, but men have sometimes lost sight of the metaphor, and raised very absurd notions from a literal interpretation, as I shall have occasion to observe to you in treating on this subject.

The words now read to you are an inference from what had been before said, as is evident from the manner in which they are introduced: 'If ye then be risen with Christ.' It is plain likewise that they must refer to something which had been said of our resurrection with or in Christ: for this conclusion supposes that doctrine already laid down and established. To find this connexion, we must look back as far as the middle of the foregoing chapter, where the doctrine referred to in the text is plainly declared. At the tenth and following verses thus you will read: 'And ye are complete in him, (that is, in Christ Jesus) which is the head of all principality and power. In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the

circumcision of Christ. Buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead: and you, being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.' From this the inference in the text naturally follows; 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.'

For the explication of these words, it will be necessary to set before you the representation which the Scripture makes of the natural state and condition of man, and of his gospel state on his becoming a Christian.

In the state of nature the Scripture represents men, Eph. iv. 17. 18. as 'walking in the vanity of their minds. Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through ignorance and blindness of heart.' As 'walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience:' chap. ii. 2. As 'children of wrath, having their conversation in the lust of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind:' ver. 3. As 'strangers to the covenants of promise, as having no hope, and without God in the world:' ver. 12. As 'servants of sin, yielding their members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity, unto iniquity:' Rom. vi. 19. 20. And because the end of these things is death, therefore this state of sin is called likewise a state of death: 'You hath he quickened,' says our Apostle, 'who were dead in trespasses and sins:' Eph. ii. 1. The same he repeats at the fifth verse. Whilst men were thus dead to God and unto themselves, they lived only to sin and unrighteousness. Sin therefore is said to 'reign in them,' to have 'dominion over them.' The natural passions and affections in this state of corruption were but the instruments of sin, in all things subservient; and therefore are said to constitute the body of sin, that body over which sin, as the soul or active principle, had intire rule and dominion. Thus we read, Rom. vi. 6. 'The old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.' And in the second of the Colossians, and eleventh verse, we are said 'to put off the body of the sins of the

flesh.' The members, of which this body is made up, are in the next chapter described: 'Mortify therefore your members which are on earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:' Col. iii. 5. This body is by St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, called the body of death, for the same reason that the state of sin is called the state of death: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' or as the margin renders it, 'from this body of death:' chap. vii. 24. The body, together with the soul, which is the active principle of life, and the influencer and director of the body and all its motions, constitutes the man. From hence therefore, by an easy and natural metaphor, these depraved appetites and affections, which are the instruments or members of sin, and which compose the body of sin, together with the evil principle ruling in us, and directing these affections in the pursuit of all uncleanness and iniquity, and which is called 'sin,' are said in Scripture to be the 'old man;' the man which only lived before the regeneration by Christ Jesus. Thus, Rom. vi. 6. 'the old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed.' And the Ephesians, chap. iv. 22., are exhorted 'to put off, concerning their former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.' This is the state of nature, according to the representation and language of holy Scripture: and it is easy to see what must become of this 'old man,' this man of sin, on the appearance of Christ Jesus, who came to destroy the works of the devil, to give light and life to those who sat in the shadow of darkness and death; he and his works must be destroyed to make way for the Spirit of righteousness and his holy works. But thus to destroy the old man, to root out all the corrupt affections of nature, and to implant a new principle of life and holiness, to restore the decayed image of God, to give new desires to the soul, new affections to the heart; what is it but to new-make the man, and by a second creation to restore him to the rights and privileges of the first, which were long since forfeited by sin and disobedience? For this reason the Christian is said to be a new creature: 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:' 2 Cor. v. 17. 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor un-

circumcision, but a new creature:' Gal. vi. 15. In the second chapter of the Ephesians, we are said to be 'the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.' And in the fourth chapter, ver. 23 and 24. we are said 'to be renewed in the spirit of our mind: to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.' Nay, we are said even to put on Christ, from the similitude of will and affections between Christ and his true members: 'As many of you as have been baptised,' says the Apostle to the Galatians, 'have put on Christ:' chap. iii. 27.

From this account it is easy to understand the propriety of the words or phrases made use of to express these two conditions. Sometimes we read that we were 'dead' before the knowlege of Christ: sometimes, that 'we died' and 'were buried with Christ:' again, 'that we rose with Christ, and are alive in him.' Now to be dead before the coming of Christ, and yet to die with Christ after his coming, and yet still to be alive in Christ, may seem to be assertions inconsistent with respect to the same person: and so indeed they are. But if we take the same view of man that the Scripture does, the inconsistency will soon vanish. Man was at first created after the image and likeness of God, with a rectitude of mind and will, with inclinations adapted to his true happiness, and subject to the influence and direction of reason: this was man after the image of God. But on disobedience man became a quite different person; his understanding was darkened, his will corrupted, his inclinations distorted to the pursuit of evil continually. This change was a real death of the man created after the image of God; he could no longer exercise any of the functions proper to his life, but lay buried under the ruins of sin and iniquity; and this was the death of the world before the knowlege of Christ. What then was the life of the world at the coming of Christ? It was the life of sin; of the earthly man, made not in the image of God, but after the likeness of the son of disobedience. To destroy this man of sin, Christ came into the world; 'and they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts:' Gal. v. 24. And thus, with respect to the life we had at the coming of Christ, which was the life of sin, we are said to 'die with Christ,' and to be 'buried with him;' because we renounce

that life, and the affections proper to it. Thus dying to sin, we begin again to live unto God and unto true holiness: and this is a resurrection of the man made after the image of God, which before was dead in trespasses: and therefore we are said to be made 'alive in Christ,' and 'to rise' together with him.

Farther; this change was what we had not power so much as to wish for or desire for ourselves; it was undertaken and effected by Christ alone; he took our nature and our iniquities on himself, and underwent death in the behalf of all: he dying therefore on the cross for all, all are said to be crucified with him. 'He,' as the Apostle to the Hebrews tells us, 'tasted death for every man:' Heb. ii. 9. And it is St. Paul's inference, 'that if one died for all, then were all dead:' 2 Cor. v. 14. And the way to attain to the benefits of the death of Christ, is, as we learn from the same Apostle in his Epistle to the Philippians, 'to be conformable unto his death.' This conformity consists, as we have already seen, in dying to sin and the affections of it; in putting off the old man, in putting on the new man, who is created after righteousness. This St. Paul, in the sixth of the Romans, styles, 'being planted in the likeness of his death,' and 'being planted in the likeness of his resurrection.' To this likewise he plainly refers in the 29th verse of the eighth chapter: 'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.' There are many precepts likewise in Scripture, founded on this notion of our conformity with Christ. The text is one instance: another you have in the thirteenth of the Romans; 'But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lust thereof.' And again; 'How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?' And many other places there are, which must be opened with this key.

Nay, the very essence of Christianity consists in this conformity with Christ; and therefore baptism, which is our admission to the gospel, is nothing else but a solemn taking on ourselves this conformity. This we learn from St. Paul in the sixth of the Romans: 'Know ye not,' says he, 'that so many of us as were baptised in Jesus Christ, were baptised into his death; therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death;

that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life:' chap. vi. 3. 4. To walk in newness of life is our conformity to the resurrection of Christ, which was to new life and glory. For thus the Apostle presses the argument: 'Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over him. Likewise reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body:' ver. 9. 11. 12. As the resurrection of Christ was to perpetual life, never more to be exposed to death; so must our first resurrection, according to this pattern, be to perpetual holiness, and a constant freedom from sin.

If we bear in our minds this account of the Scripture language, and of the reasons on which it is founded, it will be a key to open unto us the meaning of many otherwise intricate passages of Scripture. For instance: we shall not be to seek, when we find mention made of two deaths which we must undergo, of two resurrections which we must partake in: we shall easily distinguish between the natural death of the body, and the death unto sin; between the resurrection to life eternal hereafter, and the resurrection to holiness and righteousness in this present world. 'I am crucified to the world,' says St. Paul, 'and the world to me.' 'Whosoever is born of God,' says St. John, that is, whoever is begotten to this new life in Christ by the power of God, 'overcometh the world.' St. Paul tells us that the Spirit of God will 'quicken our mortal bodies,' as well as our dead bodies. Which is not to be understood without having recourse to the first resurrection, which is to a new life of holiness here, and which must be the forerunner and introducer of the second resurrection to glory. The Apostle to the Philippians tells us that he willingly suffered the loss of all things, that 'he might know Christ and the power of his resurrection.' And this he desired to know, 'that he might attain to the resurrection of the dead:' Phil. iii. 10. 11. Where, if you remember what has been said of our being made conformable to the death and resurrection of Christ, by rising to holiness and righteousness, you will not be at a loss to understand what it is 'to know,' or feel, 'the power of Christ's

resurrection;' or to understand how the knowing the power of Christ's resurrection should be a means of attaining to the resurrection of the dead. Such is the power of Christ's resurrection, that those who feel it have, as the Apostle in the 20th verse informs us, 'their conversation in heaven; whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.' This, which St. Paul calls knowing the power of Christ's resurrection, and having our conversation in heaven, the author to the Hebrews calls, 'tasting the powers of the world to come:' Heb. vi. 5. The resurrection is indeed one of the powers of the world to come, which all partake in, and taste of, whose mortal bodies are quickened by the Spirit of God. In the verse after this it is said that those who fall from their faith, 'crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to open shame.' How does he who falls away crucify Christ, or put him to open shame? This cannot be understood but by having recourse to the Scripture representation already explained. But if we remember that all who are baptised crucify the old man with his deeds; that they put on the new man created after holiness; that the Apostle to the Galatians expressly says, 'that as many as are baptised put on Christ;' it will readily appear why it is that those who fall away crucify Christ afresh: for by receiving the faith, they put on Christ, and crucified the old man and his deeds; but if they desert the faith, and return to their former deeds, and again put on the old man, they do then crucify Christ again with his deeds, and put him once more to open shame.

This notion of the different states and conditions of man, of the death of the old man, of a new creature in Christ, runs through the precepts, exhortations, and doctrines of the gospel, which cannot be understood but by analogy to this notion; and therefore I hope I may be excused in spending so much of your time in the illustration of it. You have heard already of our death, and burial, and resurrection with Christ: but the Apostle in the text carries the metaphor still one degree higher: 'If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.' As if he had said, It is not enough that ye are risen from the dead with Christ; you must also ascend after him into heaven; for

there is your life hid in Christ, there are your true riches, and thither must you go to take care of them. You are dead to the world, and can no longer live to it; your life is spiritual and heavenly: as is your life, such must be the actions which flow from it, the inclinations that attend it. Since therefore you are dead to the world, alive to Christ through the Spirit of holiness, you must act like members of Christ, and set your affections on things above, where Christ your life is ascended. Hence it is that St. Paul often exclaims against the absurdity of a Christian's living in sin. You may just as well say that all the actions of life may be performed in the grave, when a man is dead and buried, as say that a Christian may continue in sin: for the Christian has crucified and buried the body of sin. How then, as the Apostle cries out, 'shall we who are dead to sin continue any longer therein?' Sin is the only poison by which the life of Christ, which is in us, may be destroyed. It is a life which no man can take from you but yourself. Those who kill the body cannot reach it: not all the powers of darkness, sin only excepted, can separate believers and our Lord. But every unmortified lust, every unsubdued vice, is a cancer that eats into our very vitals, and, if we do not cut them off, will in the end destroy us quite. Holiness is as necessary to our spiritual life, as eating and drinking are to our natural; and therefore the Apostle's conclusion in the text is just, 'If we be risen with Christ,' if we live with him, 'we must seek the things which are above.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XLIV.

JAMES, CHAP. III.—VERSE 17.

THE gifts of the Holy Spirit are of two kinds; either extraordinary, and peculiar to certain times and persons, and given, not for the sanctification of those on whom they are bestowed, but for the edification of the church; or common to all times of the gospel, necessary to perfect the man of God in good works, and tendered to all Christians through Christ. Of the first were those gifts bestowed on the Apostles, to enable them to convince the world by signs and wonders of the truth of their mission. It is evident, from St. Paul, 1 Cor. xiii., that the gifts of this sort conveyed no sanctifying grace to the receiver; as he supposes that they may consist with a want of charity, i. e. without the moral qualifications of a Christian; and we are therefore warranted in concluding that they do not convey the sanctifying grace of the gospel, and that they are given, not for the sake of the receivers, but for those who through them are to be converted to the knowlege of the truth: and it was for this reason that they were given in the primitive church. It is manifest then that the Scripture ascribes a twofold operation to the Spirit of God. The first has been already described; and it remains to consider the second, in explaining the words of the text; viz. the affording assistance and strength to all Christians in the performance of the duties enjoined by the gospel. The wisdom mentioned in the text is the *wisdom that is from above;* and we are instructed how to obtain it by St. James, chap. i. ver. 5.; and in verse 17 he shows on what grounds his advice stands. The instruction given, that we

should ask this wisdom *in faith;* and the reason assigned to support this faith, that with God *is no variableness, neither shadow of turning,* sufficiently show that this wisdom is the grace promised under the gospel: for the declaration of God's purpose to give this wisdom, which is only to be found in the gospel, must be supposed, before the immutability of his purpose can be given as a ground of hope to obtain the good gift by the prayer of faith. The *wisdom* in the text, then, signifies the grace of God promised in the gospel; that principle of holiness by which the disciples are enabled to *mortify the deeds of the flesh;* and of which St. Paul has said, *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.* This grace is called *wisdom,* as the *fear of the Lord* is said to be the *beginning of wisdom;* the wisdom of man consisting in obedience to God, and not in any degree of knowlege. The fruits ascribed to this wisdom in the text are not learning and knowlege, but all moral qualifications. A knowlege of mysteries and things sacred is mentioned by St. Paul among the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit; but he speaks of them as not necessarily inferring charity, and therefore as distinct from that grace or *wisdom, which is pure, and peaceable, and full of mercy.* The gifts of God are free, and we have no right to demand an equal distribution of them: if the gifts of the Spirit were granted only to some, we should not be obliged by the terms of our religion to render an account of God's proceeding herein. But the promise of the Spirit being given to all Christians, and represented as the purchase of Christ's obedience, it is evident that we cannot account for our being Christians, without showing a reason for the necessity of grace to render our hopes of salvation effectual. This is a great point of difference between the gospel and natural religion, particularly as regards the state of mankind before the gospel. If men were in that state of original purity in which we must suppose God to have created them, what grace was wanting? If they have fallen

from that state, we cannot dispute the grace of God unless we can show that it was impossible or improper for him to redeem the world. The fall of man being supposed, is it not more natural to think that God, to save the world, should destroy the power of sin, than that he should grant immortal happiness to unreformed sinners? The best argument against the necessity of grace would be a proof that the effects of the Spirit generally are or may be attained by the mere strength of nature. If men are naturally inclined to virtue and holiness, they will not want grace to make them so: but this has never yet been the case. The works of the Spirit are described in the text, and in many parts of Scripture: St. Paul, in Gal. v. 22. enumerates the fruits of the Spirit, and adds, *they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.* There is no one so little acquainted with human nature as to suppose that there exists a people who would answer to this description of St. Paul: but if we look in to the account which the same Apostle gives, Gal. v. 19., of the works of the *flesh*, we shall find too great a correspondence between them and the historical accounts of all nations. After considering the difference between the works of nature and of grace, does it appear unworthy of God to send his Spirit to make the difference? If we have not the Spirit already to produce these effects, natural reason will testify in favor of the gospel, by showing us how greatly its assistance is to be desired. It is shown that the grace of God could not be irresistible consistently with free-will; and that we can draw no argument against the promise of it, from a want of signs of it in some professors of Christianity: for we might as well conclude, from the unreasonable actions of the generality of men, that reason itself is a fiction. St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, vii. 22., has taught us to solve this difficulty: he there acknowleges that the dictates of reason are right, but of use only in convincing us of our guilt; for there is another principle in our members warring against rea-

son, which brings them under the slavery of sin : he therefore, seeing no help from reason, sought a refuge in Christ, who alone could redeem him from this captivity to sin. The Apostle founds the necessity of grace on the insufficiency of reason to overcome our natural inclinations to evil. The best evidence we can have that the grace of God is in us, is that we live up to the dictates of reason. By reason, we may know our duty; by grace we are enabled to perform it. The only evidence Christians can give that this grace of God dwelleth in them, must arise from their works of love and obedience. Our Saviour himself says, *by their fruits shall ye know them;* and St. John declares, *This is the love of God, that ye keep his commandments.* Our Saviour, in St. John chap. xv., speaks to the same effect. Every Christian is bound to answer for himself, or to quit his pretensions to the hopes and promises of the gospel, when unbelievers object to the want of evidence of the operation of the Spirit in the works of Christians. The confidence of some that they have the Spirit of God, though they have no good works to allege in proof of it, is a conceit not belonging to the gospel. If we would know whether the Spirit of God be in us, we must examine ourselves by the text. St. James speaks of two sorts of wisdom; the one *earthly, sensual, devilish,* the fruits of which are *every evil work;* the other heavenly, *which is pure and peaceable:* it is easy to distinguish to which class we belong. Our Saviour, in his discourse with Nicodemus, compares the influence of the Spirit to the blowing of the wind; and how the new birth and regeneration is performed, he only can tell who performs it : but its effects are visible to all. As the fruits of the Spirit are its only evidence, so its end is the production of these good fruits. The terms sanctification, regeneration, &c. signify to us that the Spirit is given to redeem us from sin. It is no small commendation, that those things in the gospel which seem most mysterious have the plainest use. The gifts of the Holy Spirit

are offered to us on the terms of the gospel, which calls us to holiness and obedience. What design or contrivance have we to suspect? Even supposing that we are deceived into goodness, would not the advantage be our own, and would not the world be happier thereby? The conclusion is plain: righteousness and holiness are the only certain marks of regeneration. All other distinctions invented by men are marks only of spiritual pride.

DISCOURSE XLIV.

JAMES, CHAP. III.—VERSE 17.

The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated: full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

THE gifts of the Holy Spirit are distinguishable into two kinds, being either extraordinary, and peculiar to some times and persons; and given, not for the sanctification of the men on whom they are bestowed, but for the edification of the church, which is the body of Christ: or they are common to all times of the gospel, and necessary to perfect the man of God in every good work; and therefore tendered to all who undertake the conditions of Christianity, according to the promise of God made through Christ Jesus. Of the first sort were those wonderful gifts bestowed on the Apostles, and first planters of Christianity, by which they were enabled to convey the knowlege of the salvation of God to men of all languages, and to convince the world by signs, and wonders, and mighty works, of the truth of their mission; and that the word by them spoken was the word of life, proceeding from him, whose power was made use of in confirmation of it.

That the gifts of this sort conveyed no sanctifying grace to the receiver, is evident from what St. Paul has taught us, 1 Cor. xiii. 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowlege; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing.' The supposition here made, that the exercise of these gifts may consist with a want

of charity, that is, with the want of the moral qualifications of a Christian, warrants the conclusion that these gifts do not convey the sanctifying grace of the gospel; and that they are given, not for the sake of the receivers, but for the sake of others, who through their ministry are to be converted to the knowlege of the truth. For this reason they were given, and for some time continued in the primitive church, to make way for the acknowlegement of Christ, and for the conviction of unbelievers; and may be again renewed whenever God shall think fit visibly to interpose in the farther propagation of his gospel in the heathen world.

It is manifest then that the Scripture ascribes to the Spirit of God a twofold operation in the work of the gospel. The first is that already mentioned, and is the supplying and furnishing motives of credibility, and proper means to establish the doctrine of faith. The second is that now to be considered in explaining the words of the text, to wit, the affording assistance and strength to all who undertake the conditions of the gospel, to perform them, and to render a service worthy of the gospel, and acceptable to our God and Saviour.

The wisdom mentioned in the text is described to be the 'wisdom that is from above,' that is, which is given or communicated from above. And in the first chapter the Apostle instructs us how to obtain it: 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him: but let him ask in faith.' And soon after he shows us on what grounds his advice stands: 'Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.'

The instruction given, that we should ask this wisdom 'in faith;' the reason assigned to support this faith, that with God 'is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;' do sufficiently show that the wisdom which we are encouraged to ask for is no other than the grace promised under the gospel: for the declaration of God's purpose to give this wisdom, which is no where declared but in the gospel, must be supposed, before the immutability of his purpose can be alleged as a ground of hope and assurance to obtain the good gift by the prayer of faith.

By the word 'wisdom' then in the text, we must understand the grace of God promised in the gospel, and considered in Scripture as the ruling and governing principle in the disciples of Christ: that principle of holiness by which they are enabled to 'mortify the deeds of the flesh;' by which they 'do no sin, and are alive to righteousness;' elsewhere spoken of as 'the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them,' and by which their 'mortal bodies are quickened;' and described as so necessary to a Christian, that the Apostle to the Romans has affirmed, 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.'

This grace is called 'wisdom' on the same account that the 'fear of the Lord' is said to be the 'beginning of wisdom;' because the wisdom of man consisteth in the obedience of God, in whose hand are the issues of life and death, and not on the account of any degrees of knowlege, either sacred or civil, which it is supposed to convey. The fruits ascribed to this wisdom in the text are all moral qualifications: it is pure, and peaceable, and gentle, full of mercy, and the like; of the learning and knowlege which proceed from it, we read nothing. The knowlege of mysteries, and things sacred, may be reckoned among the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, and are mentioned as such by St. Paul in the passage of his Epistle to the Corinthians already alleged: but he speaks of them as not necessarily inferring charity, and consequently as distinct gifts from that grace or 'wisdom, which is pure, and peaceable, and full of mercy.'

The gifts of the Spirit, considered with respect to the Author of them, and the motives inducing him to bestow them, are properly styled 'the grace of God;' for 'of his own will begat he us with the word of truth,' and of his own will it is that he enableth us to run the course that is set before us: so that our confidence is, to use the language of St. Paul, 'that he which hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.' But considered with respect to their influence on the receiver, they are, by St. James in the text, styled 'wisdom,' as correcting the depravity of nature, and enabling men to 'become wise unto salvation.'

The gifts of God are free, and he bestoweth them as seemeth best to his wisdom. If he gives to one more liberally than

to another, yet he who receives least has reason to be thankful, and no reason to demand an account of God of the unequal distribution of his favor. Were the gifts therefore of the Spirit to be considered as special favors only granted to some, we should not be obliged, by the terms of our religion, to render an account of God's proceeding herein. But the promise of the Spirit being general to all Christians, and represented in Scripture as the purchase of Christ's obedience to the will of his Father, and as a principle of new life, by which they who were dead in sin are made alive to righteousness; it is evident that we cannot account for our being Christians, without showing a reason for the necessity of grace to render our hopes and assurances of salvation effectual.

This is a point in which there is an essential difference between the gospel and mere natural religion; and it is consequent to another point of difference relating to the state and condition of mankind before the gospel. If men were in that state of original purity in which God must, in justice to his divine attributes, be supposed to have made them, it will be hard to say what grace was wanting to enable them to attain the end of their creation. If they have fallen from that state, and contracted a corruption not to be cured by natural means, it will be hard for any man to dispute against the grace of God, without having a reason to produce, that shall render it impossible, or improper, for God to redeem the world. For the fall of man supposed, it is more reasonable to think, because it is far more honorable to God, that he should destroy the power of sin by communicating a new principle of holiness, in order to the salvation of the world, than that he should honor sin so far as to render sinners both glorious and immortal. Since then there can be no redemption, but either by destroying sin, or by granting happiness to sinners, unreformed sinners, it is easy to judge which method is most suitable to the wisdom of God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

It will be one means of showing the necessity of grace, to show the effects ascribed to it in Scripture. For the Spirit of God is certainly given for the sake of those effects which were to be produced by it in true believers: and he that can prove that the same effects generally are, or may be, attained by the mere

strength of nature, will give the best argument against the necessity of grace in order to salvation. For if men are naturally inclined to virtue and holiness, they will not want grace to make them so. But this has never yet been the case; and if we may judge of those who shall be after us, by ourselves, and those who have lived before us, this never will be the case.

Now the works of the Spirit are described to us in many places of Scripture. They are in the text set forth to be 'pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.' The Apostle to the Galatians, chap. v. 22. reckoning up the fruits of the Spirit, places them in this order; 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;' and continuing his account, though varying his style, he adds, 'and they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.'

Were the manners of any people to be described in this language, there is no one so little acquainted with human nature, but that he would suspect the truth of the relation. Where must we go, to the east or to the west, to find a people pure and peaceable, full of mercy and good works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy, crucifying the flesh and the affections and lusts thereof? No history has yet presented us with such an idea of mankind. But if we look into the account which the same Apostle gives of the works of the flesh, we shall find too great a correspondence between them, and the historical accounts of all nations: they are, 'adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like.' These works we know where to find, and are sure of not mistaking in what country soever we seek them. You see the difference between the works of nature and grace: and tell me, was it a work unworthy of God to send his Spirit to make the difference? If you think it not yet so sufficiently made as to answer the pretensions of the gospel, yet you must own that here is a work worthy of God to undertake; and that if we have not the

Spirit already to produce these effects, it were much to be wished that we had: so that natural reason shall be forced to give this testimony to the gospel, that the help it proposes is the thing in the world the most to be desired, the most honorable for God to give, the most advantageous for man to receive. If you ask us what evidence we have to show, that we have received this promise of the gospel; it were well indeed if we had more evidence than we have, and that every man naming the name of Christ were a living testimony of the Spirit of God working in him; and yet I trust we have enough to show that the promises of God are not in vain. The Spirit is given to be a principle of religion, and not of force and mechanism; and consequently it must be maintained to be consistent with the freedom of man's will, without the supposition of which it is impossible to have any notion of religion: and if many, who by their profession of Christianity are intitled to the promise of the Spirit, do show no signs of the power of God working in them, they will be so many proofs indeed that the grace of God is not irresistible: but no better argument can be drawn from their case to show that the pretences to grace are mere fiction, than may be drawn from the unreasonable actions of the generality of men to show that reason itself is a fiction, and that there is no such governing principle in mankind.

We have indeed the fullest proof that there is such a thing as reason and natural understanding in men; and therefore the abuse of reason creates no suspicion against the being of it: but the Deist sees no proof of the reality of grace in any; the effects we ascribe to it, and which are the only visible evidences for its reality, are no other than what reason prescribes; and wherever they are found, he claims them as the work of reason, and demands of us to show on what ground we ascribe them to any other principle. If men are meek, and charitable, and good, void of partiality and hypocrisy, they are but what their reason tells them they should be; and since these virtues flow from the dictates of reason, by what right do we impute them to another principle? The Apostle to the Romans has taught us the resolution of this difficulty: 'I

delight,' says he, 'in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.' That the dictates of reason are just and right, St. Paul acknowleges; but right as they are, we gain little by them but the conviction of sin and guilt; for there is another principle in the members warring against this principle of reason, or law of the mind, which brings us under the slavery of sin. This state afforded him so little comfort, notwithstanding the goodness of his reason to distinguish rightly between virtue and vice, that he exclaims in the bitterness of his soul, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Under these agonies he saw no help in nature, no assistance to be had from reason; and therefore he flies to the arms of Christ for shelter, and owns him for his only Redeemer from this captivity to sin: 'I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.' And having found this safe retreat, he goes on in another strain: 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit: for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.'

You see how the Apostle founds the necessity of grace: not in this, that we want reason to show us the difference between good and evil, and to direct us in our duty; but in this, that the light of reason is too weak a restraint on the inclinations to evil, which are become natural to man. These inclinations overpowering reason, bring in the slavery of sin and death. We become slaves by departing from the law of reason; we are freed from slavery by grace: grace therefore is given to restore us to the obedience of reason. So far is it from being an objection to the reality of grace, that the works of grace are works of reason, that the very best evidence we can have that the grace of God is in us, is this, that we live up to the pure and sincere dictates of reason. We ascribe it not to grace, that we know our duty; but this we ascribe to it, that we are able to perform it. And on this state of the case it appears

that the evidence which Christians can make to themselves and others, that the Spirit of God dwelleth in them, must arise from their works of love and obedience.

This trial, though it may prove in the end a severe one, since the love of many is grown cold, we can by no means refuse. For how shall we refuse to stand trial by the rule laid down by our Saviour, 'By their fruits,' says he, 'you shall know them;' and by his Apostle St. John, 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments?' To the same purpose our Lord speaks in the fifteenth of St. John, comparing himself to a vine, and his Father to an husbandman: 'I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.'

Unbelievers may have many objections to make against the operations of the Holy Spirit, which need not affect or disturb the faith and hope of a Christian. But when they object to us the want of evidence in the works of Christians, they raise a difficulty which every believer is bound to answer for himself, or to quit his pretensions to the hopes and promises of the gospel. The confidence of some, that they have the Spirit of God, though they have nothing but their own confidence to allege in proof of it, is a conceit unknown to the churches of God: the gospel is a stranger to it, and it was taught in some other school than that of Christ.

If you would know whether the Spirit of Christ be in you of a truth, you have a plain rule in the text to examine yourself by. The Apostle St. James speaks of two sorts of wisdom, the one 'earthly, sensual, devilish;' the fruits of which are, 'envyings, strife, confusion, and every evil work:' the other heavenly, which is 'pure and peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, without hypocrisy.' It is no hard matter for a man to know to which class he belongs; the characters are bold, and easily distinguished; the difference is so great between confusion and peace, strife and gentleness, envy and mercy, every evil work and every good work, that we cannot easily mistake in applying these marks. Search therefore your own hearts, for thence

must come the resolution, whether the Spirit of Christ dwell in you or no. How the Spirit cometh, or how it goeth, we know not. Our Saviour, in his discourse with Nicodemus, compares the influence of the Spirit to the blowing of the wind, 'Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.' How the new birth and regeneration is performed, he only can tell who performs it; but the effects of it every man may see, they are as discernible as the noise of the winds, though in their cause and spring as secret, and altogether as far removed from human sight.

As the fruits of the Spirit are the only evidence we can have of the Spirit, so the end of giving the Spirit is the producing these good fruits. Sanctification, regeneration, and all other terms by which the operation and work of the Spirit in believers are denoted, signify to us that the Spirit is given to redeem us from sin, and to render us a people acceptable to God, zealous of good works. And surely it is no small commendation of the gospel, that the things in it which seem most mysterious, have the plainest use, and are introduced to promote such ends as must appear to the most prejudiced mind to be honorable to God and advantageous to mankind. We offer you, on the terms of the gospel, the gifts of the Holy Ghost: in virtue of this offer we call you to holiness and obedience. What design or contrivance have you to suspect? If any thing is to be gained by your being virtuous, the advantage will be all your own. Nay, suppose that you are deceived into goodness, yet for you at least it will be a happy deceit; and, I think, no unhappy one for the rest of the world. Who will suffer by men's becoming gentle and peaceable? If there were more of this spirit in the world, it would be a much happier place than it is: for the strife and confusion, and all the miseries which we see and hear, have their rise from that wisdom which is earthly and sensual.

From what has been said arises this plain conclusion: that the true way of judging whether the Spirit of God be in us, is to consider our own deeds. Righteousness and holiness are the only certain marks of regeneration. Other distinctions which men have invented are rather marks of their spiritual

pride, and of their separation from the body of Christians, than of their union with Christ the head. Take heed therefore that you adorn the faith with a meekness and quietness of spirit, that you may have the comfort and consolation of knowing that you have not believed in vain.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XLV.

MATTHEW, CHAP. V.—VERSE 48.

As practice is the end of all precepts and exhortations, to command or exhort to any thing impracticable must be absurd. Some have endeavored to obviate this objection to the text, by affirming that it contains only counsel or advice, and not a command or precept: the insufficiency of this reasoning is shown. The reason and equity of God can be no more justified in advising than in commanding impossibilities: others tell us that it is not equality, but quality of perfections that the text enjoins; and that we are commanded to aim at the same perfections with God, though not in the same degree. This exposition, though it avoids the difficulty complained of, is not that which arises from the circumstances of the text. From the words of our Lord, in Matth. v. 43-46. preceding the text, it is evident that it was not the quality of mercy, which even the publicans possessed in some degree, that our Lord recommended; but the extensive exercise of it, which was discernible in the works of providence. As these expositions afford no relief, it is to be considered what assistance we derive from the circumstances of the context, or the general reason in which the precept is founded: for if we consider it as part of the gospel doctrine, it will be sufficient to know how far it may be extended on the authority of the gospel; or if as a general maxim and rule of religion founded on reason, and antecedent to the gospel, we must discover how far the reason of the command goes, and how it may be applied to the duties of religion and morality. First: the text examined, as it stands

limited by the circumstances of the context. It is shown that the precept is applied to the particular case of charity and mercy: in other instances of duty the example of God is not proposed; and there are some to which neither the example nor the exhortation can be applied, such as the duties arising from the relations which are peculiar to man; as in the case of afflictions and persecutions, which are to be borne patiently. In the instance of mercy and forgiveness, what greater motive can we have to obedience than the example of God, who bears with so much lenity the abuses and affronts of wicked men? Supposing then that this example is confined to the exercise of love and mercy, it is shown that our Saviour's precise meaning must be, that our love should be universal, unconfined by partialities, and with respect to its objects as large as God's is: not that our love either to enemies or friends can be supposed to bear any proportion to the divine love. Though in this case of extending our love, the example and the exhortation are proper, in others it would be very injurious to the Deity to suppose that any example could be drawn from his perfections. An instance of this is given in the government of the thoughts. As therefore the exhortation to imitate the divine perfections cannot reach to all parts of our duty, it ought not to be considered a general precept. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, exhorts them to be followers of God as little children: but we see, from chap. iv. 33., and chap. v. 1. 2. that this exhortation stands inclosed on both sides with the precepts of love and charity, as if he intended to secure it from being applied to any thing else. That this was also our Saviour's meaning may be inferred from the sixth chapter of St. Luke, who, in the sermon on the mount, after introducing the example of God, concludes with an exhortation referring to the example, as St. Matt. does; but instead of the phrase, *Be ye perfect as your Father is perfect*, says only, *Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful.* If the two Evangelists are consistent,

the exhortation of St. Matthew can relate only to that particular perfection of mercy and forgiveness recommended by our Saviour; and is therefore of no greater extent than St. Luke's. The holy writers often require of us that we should be perfect and blameless; or, as St. Paul says, Coloss. iv. 12. *stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. The will of God* manifested to us is the rule of perfection which we ought to aim at; the perfections of the Deity are not to be attained by any creature. Though there is no room to exhort men to be perfect, as God is perfect, yet it is reasonable to press them to imitate their heavenly Father. The imitation of God has not for its end the attaining to the perfection of God, but to the greatest perfection of which we are capable. In this sense St. Peter exhorts us to be holy, because God is holy (1 Pet. v. 1-15.); and St. John expresses the same, chap. iii. 3. A conformity to the divine nature in the moral perfections of it is the utmost excellence and happiness of human souls; and this was taught by some few wise heathens, who found, by the light of reason and nature, wherein the true dignity and happiness of man consisted: for the imitation of God has its foundation in the reason and nature of things. This is the second thing considered. That we should endeavor to be perfect, even as God is perfect, in the strict meaning of the words, is the direction neither of reason nor revelation. It is shown that the perfections which are essential to God, considered as a rational being, are those which we as rational beings ought to aspire to; and as they are in him in the utmost perfection, to say that we are to imitate the excellences of the Deity, means only that we ought to endeavor after those perfections which are natural and proper to rational minds, which belong to us as made in the likeness of God. Though the example of God be a strong motive for holiness, yet it is but a secondary argument, and supposes an antecedent obligation to the duty, the due performance of which we learn from it. We must therefore search

for a reason why some of the perfections of God are proper examples, and others not so; that is, we must search for their primary rule of duty. It is shown that from the light of our own minds we discern the difference of moral good and evil, and the obligations consequent on that difference: the moral perfections of the Deity are made visible to us by the same light; so that the same reason which holds forth to us the rule of our duty, holds forth also the perfect example of it: it follows that to obey the dictates of reason, and to imitate the example of God, is the same thing. This appears by considering that we can only trace the perfections of the Deity from the natural notions of perfection in our own minds; so that whether we follow the dictates of reason in endeavoring after these virtues, or copy from the perfection of the Deity, we follow the same virtues, though placed in a different view. The imitation of God therefore is a principle of religion arising from and depending on the right use of reason; and this shows us on what foundation it stands in natural religion, and how we may apply this principle in particular cases. It is absurd to aim at the measure of God's perfection: we are perfect as he is perfect, when we do only what he will approve. To stand approved in the eye of an all-perfect being is the true perfection of every creature: this is the Christian excellency described by St. Paul, Coloss. iv. 12.

DISCOURSE XLV.

MATTHEW, CHAP. V.—VERSE 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

PRACTICE is the end of all precepts and exhortations: laws are therefore enacted, that subjects may obey: exhortations are therefore added, that they may be encouraged to do their duty. It must then be a very great absurdity to make any thing, in its own nature impracticable, the subject matter either of command or advice. And does not the text seem liable to this objection? Is there any thing which men have more reason to think impossible to them, than to arrive at the perfections of the Deity? Why then are we commanded or exhorted to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect, since nothing but disappointment can be the issue of our strongest endeavors after this perfection, from which we stand excluded by the unalterable laws of nature? This difficulty is too obvious to escape any one's notice. Some therefore tell you that the text contains only matter of counsel or advice, but not of precept or command, and with this softening they think the difficulty may be digested; as if it were more reasonable, or more becoming an inspired teacher, to advise than to command impossibilities: whereas the only difference in the case is, that in matters of command we must either obey or suffer, in matters of counsel only we have a greater latitude allowed to us; so that with respect to ourselves it is more tolerable to be advised than to be commanded to things impracticable: but with respect to the lawgiver, it is one and the same thing, and his reason and equity can be no more justified in advising than in command-

ing impossibilities. Others tell you that it is not equality, but quality of perfections that is enjoined in the text; that is, we are commanded to aim at the same perfections with God, though not in the same degree; that, as God is just, and righteous, and merciful, so must we endeavor to be just, and righteous, and merciful, though not to the same degree or extent that God is. This exposition avoids the difficulty complained of; for there is nothing extraordinary in commanding men to imitate the perfections of God in a degree suitable to their own nature and ability. But then this is an exposition, not arising from the circumstances of the text, which lead us to a more extensive view.

In the 43d verse our Saviour says, 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.' In the 44th verse he corrects the partiality of this law; 'but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.' In the 45th and 46th verses, he confirms his own precept from the example and authority of God: 'that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For, if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?' And in the 48th verse he concludes this argument in the words of the text; 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' From whence it is evident that the quality or temper of mercy and compassion was not the thing recommended to us by our blessed Lord from the example of God, for that he told them even the publicans had in some degree, for they loved those who loved them; but it is the extent of this mercy and compassion which was discernible in the works of Providence, which he presses from this example: your Father in heaven is bountiful to the evil as well as the good; to the unjust as well as the just: go ye therefore and do likewise, and learn from hence to love your enemies as well as your friends; to do good to those who hate you, as well as to those who love you. This certainly was recommending not only the temper of mercy, which is natural to the Deity, but also that

extensive exercise of it, that perfection of goodness, which shone forth in all his works.

Since then we can have no relief from expositions of this kind, we must consider the text in another view, and see what assistance we can have from the circumstances of the context, or the general reason in which the precept is founded. And these two inquiries will take in what is necessary to be known on this subject. For if we consider this precept as part of the gospel doctrine, it will be sufficient to know how far it may be extended on the authority of the gospel: or if we consider it as a general maxim and rule of religion, which had a foundation in reason antecedent to the promulgation of the gospel, it will be sufficient to understand how far the reason of the command goes, and how it may be applied to the several duties of religion and morality.

First then, let us examine the text as it stands limited by the circumstances of the context.

It is evident from what has been already observed, that the precept of the text stands applied to the particular case of charity and mercy. Had it been otherwise, had our Saviour intended, in every instance of our duty, to refer us to the perfection of God, as the proper rule and measure of our obedience, this precept should have stood at the close of his sermon, which might have given it a reference to all that had gone before, and not been confined in the middle of his discourse to a particular duty. It is farther to be observed that the instance of duty to which this precept is annexed, is illustrated by a particular mention of God's dealing with men in like cases. We are bid to love our enemies, and are told how merciful and compassionate God is to the evil and unjust; the natural application of the example lies in the exhortation of the text, that we should aim at that perfection of mercy and goodness, which we may every day see exercised by God towards us all. But in other instances of duty mentioned in this sermon, the example of God is not proposed; and considering the connexion between the example and the application, there can be no reason to carry the application to other cases, in which the same example is not proposed. Nay farther, there are some points of duty explained and enforced in this sermon on the

mount, to which neither the example nor the exhortation can be applied. Such are the duties arising from the relations which are peculiar to man, and no where else to be found: as in the case of afflictions and persecutions, which we ought to bear patiently, not in consideration of the example of the Deity, whom no afflictions can approach, but in consideration of his goodness and power, who thinks fit to inflict them on us. In the instance of mercy and forgiveness, to which the exhortation in the text stands applied, there can be no greater or properer motive to obedience than the example of our heavenly Father; it cuts off all the pretences which men have for anger or revenge. Has your enemy abused or affronted you? What then? Are you greater than God, who bears with so much lenity the perpetual abuses and affronts of wicked men? Or are you provoked to revenge the iniquities you behold, and to extirpate the profane and ungodly? Believe at least that God is not unconcerned for his own honor; and therefore, even in this case, you cannot be more safe or secure than by following the example which he sets you in the daily administrations of his providence.

Supposing then that this example is confined to the exercise of love and mercy; yet still, can we pretend to be as good and as merciful as God is, or does our Saviour require it of us? If not, where is the limitation to be placed? It must be placed undoubtedly where our Saviour himself has placed it. He tells you how imperfect the old doctrine was, because it required of us only to love our friends, and permitted us to hate our enemies: but God, says he, loves and does good to his enemies as well as his friends. This is perfect love, not restrained by partialities. When therefore it follows, 'Be ye perfect, as your Father;' the precise meaning is, let your love be universal, unconfined by partialities, and with respect to its objects, as large as God's is: not that our love either to enemies or friends can be supposed in other respects, and as to the effects of it, to bear any proportion to the divine love.

But as in this case of extending our love, the example is proper, and therefore also the exhortation to follow it; so in others it would be very injurious to the Deity to suppose that any example could be drawn from his perfections. In our

present state of corruption, it is a great part of religion to govern our thoughts well, and the inward inclinations of our hearts; but it would be as reasonable to bid us govern the world as God governs it, as to govern our thoughts as he governs his: he is liable to none of the imperfections which make the government of our thoughts to be a necessary duty in us: he has told us, 'My thoughts are not as your thoughts:' and where there is no similitude in the cases, no example can be drawn from the one to the other. So that in this, and in many other instances which might be given, we have a duty incumbent on us, towards the due performance of which we can draw no example from the divine perfections. Since then the exhortation to imitate the divine perfections cannot reach to all parts of our duty, I see no reason why it should be extended to any on the authority of our Saviour, to which he himself has not extended it: and as the use of it is peculiarly reserved in holy writ to the case of mercy and forgiveness, it ought by no means to be drawn into a general precept, to the perplexing as well the understandings as the consciences of the weak. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, exhorts them to be 'followers of God, as dear children:' but then it is with regard to this very case: for he had said immediately before, chap. iv. 32. 'Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you;' and, with reference to this duty, he adds, ver. 1st of the next chapter, 'Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;' to which he subjoins, 'And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, giving himself for us:' ver. 2. So that his exhortation to follow God stands inclosed on both sides with the precepts of love and charity, as if he intended to secure it from being applied to any thing else. And if our Saviour meant any thing more in the text, if he had a view to any other duties or commands than that of love and mercy only, when he placed before us the example of our heavenly Father, St. Luke, I am sure, has done him great injury in reporting his doctrine. He, in the sixth chapter of his gospel, gives us the sermon on the mount; when he comes to the topic of love and forgiveness, he introduces the example of God, 'who is kind to the unthankful, and to the evil.' He concludes also with an

exhortation referring to the example, as St. Matthew does: but instead of the general phrase used by St. Matthew, 'Be ye perfect, as your Father is perfect;' St. Luke has it only, 'Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.' The two Evangelists are giving an account of the same sermon, and of the same passage; and if they are consistent, St. Matthew's, 'Be ye perfect, as God is perfect,' can relate only to that particular perfection of mercy and forgiveness, which our Saviour had been recommending, and is of no greater extent than St. Luke's, 'Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.' The holy writers often require of us that we should be perfect and blameless; that is, as St. Paul expresses it in the fourth of the Colossians, and twelth verse, that we 'should stand perfect and complete in all the will of God:' but it is one thing to be perfect in all the will of God, and another to be perfect even as he is perfect. The will of God, however manifested to us, is the proper rule of the perfection we ought to aim at; but the transcendent perfections of the Deity are to be reverenced and adored, but never attained to by any creature.

It is true, that as the moral perfections of the Deity afford us the truest image of holiness and purity, so are they the best patterns to place before our eyes for the conduct of our own lives. It is praiseworthy to imitate a perfection as far as we are able, though we can never hope to come up to the great original: and though there is no room to exhort men to be perfect as God is perfect, yet it is reasonable to press them to imitate their heavenly Father. For neither he who advises the imitation, nor he who attempts it, go on the supposition that it is either necessary or possible to be as perfect as he: but this they both agree in, that the nearer any one can come to the pattern, the more perfect he will be; and therefore the imitation of God has not for its end the attaining to the perfections of God, but the attaining to the greatest perfection we are capable of. In this sense St. Peter exhorts us to be holy, because God is holy: 'For as he,' says the Apostle, 'which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation:' 1 Peter i. 15. And St. John, in his first Epistle, chap. iii. 3. to the same purpose: 'Every man that hath this

hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure.' The notion we have of the purity and holiness of God is a very powerful motive to us to be holy and pure, since nothing but holiness and purity can recommend us to the favor and protection of a being who is holy and pure. A conformity therefore to the divine nature in the moral perfections of it, is the utmost excellence and happiness of human souls, and that which we ought to labor to attain with the greatest ardor and contention of mind. It is a noble subject for the entertainment of our thoughts; but it has had the misfortune to owe more to the power of imagination than to the light of reason; and has had so great a place allowed it in some enthusiastical writers, as to be less cultivated than it deserves by soberer inquirers. And yet this conformity to the divine nature was a lesson taught by some few wise heathens, who found, by the light of reason and nature, wherein the true dignity and happiness of man consisted: for the imitation of God is not a new principle introduced into religion by the revelation of the gospel, but has its foundation in the reason and nature of things.

And this was the second thing I proposed to consider.

That we should endeavor to be perfect, even as God is perfect, in the strict meaning of the words, is no more the direction of reason than it is of revelation; he knows but little of himself, and less of God, who is capable of such a thought. But that we should aim at the resemblance of the divine perfections, as far as our present state will permit, is but the natural consequence arising from the knowlege we have of God, and the obligation we are under to cultivate and improve our own minds. God is a rational being, and so are we, though at a great distance from him. As we are thus far made in the image and likeness of God, so are we capable, by the enlargement of our faculties, of a nearer approach to him: for the moral perfections of all rational minds are in kind the same, however vastly they differ in degree. Were it otherwise, the perfections of the Deity could not be so much a pattern for us to follow. Were holiness, righteousness, justice, and mercy, of a different nature considered in God, from what they are when considered in man, it is plain that the holiness or goodness of God could be neither the example nor the motive of

holiness in men: and it would be absurd to say, as the Scripture does, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy;' unless holiness in both cases, as applied to God, and as applied to man, denoted a moral perfection of the same kind, proper to both as rational beings, though attainable by us only in that proportion which our weak nature will allow. Since then the perfections which are essential to God, considered as a rational being, are the very same which we, as rational beings, ought to aspire to, since they are in him in the utmost perfection also; to say that we ought to conform ourselves to the divine nature, and to imitate the excellences of it, is no more than to say that we ought to endeavor after those perfections which are natural and proper to rational minds; and which belong to us in consequence of that image and likeness of our Maker, which was stamped on us at our first creation.

But though the example of God be in itself a very strong motive and argument for holiness, yet in the nature of the thing example is but a secondary argument, and supposes an antecedent obligation to the duty, the due performance of which we learn from the example set before us. It is no reason for me to endeavor to do this or that, because I see another do it; for it may be fit for him to do, and yet very unfit for me to attempt; and therefore example can have no place till the rule of duty is first settled. It would be very absurd to think that every thing that God does yields a proper example for us to follow; and therefore we are to search for a reason why some of his perfections are proper examples, and others not so: that is, we are to search for their primary rule of duty, which obliges us to endeavor after some of the perfections discoverable in the Deity, and not the others.

In all inquiries of this kind, the last resort must be to the light of our own minds; from hence arises the obligation we are under to moral virtue. We are a law to ourselves, and such a law as no power whatever can absolve us from the obedience due to it, as long as we continue to enjoy the same powers and faculties of reason which at present we are endowed with. From this light of nature we learn both the law and the example which we are now inquiring after, that is, we learn our own obligation to holiness, and we learn to know God, who is perfect

holiness. Did reason discover to us the moral perfections of the Deity, without showing us at the same time any obligation incumbent on us to follow after the like perfections, the holiness of God so discovered would be no more an example for our imitation than his power is. It is therefore from the light of our own minds that we discover the difference of moral good and evil, and the obligations consequent on that difference; it is from the same light that we find the moral perfections to be possessed by the Deity in their utmost beauty: so that the same reason and nature which holds forth to us the rule of our duty, holds forth also the perfect example of it. Now, since no example is a good one which does not teach the same doctrine with the rule of duty, and the rule of duty in this case being the light of our own minds; it must necessarily follow that to obey the dictates of reason, and to imitate the example of God, is in the end one and the same thing.

That it must be so will appear by considering that we can no other way trace the perfections of the Deity, but from those natural notions of perfection which we find in our own minds: we should not ascribe to God holiness, justice, and mercy, did not the light of reason discover to us the excellences of these attributes. Now the holiness, justice, and mercy, which the light of reason discovers, are the moral virtues which we are obliged to follow after; they are also the perfections which we ascribe to the Deity: so that whether we follow the dictates of reason in endeavoring after these virtues, or whether we look up to the Deity, and copy from the perfections of his nature; it is evident that in both cases we follow the same virtues, though placed before us in a different view. For since our notion of the perfections of the Deity must be formed from such natural notions of moral perfection, as reason and the light of nature can supply: whether we consider these perfections as inherent in the Deity, and endeavor to copy after the first and great original, or whether we take our natural notions of moral virtue, as principles and rules of religion, which ought to influence and direct our lives, the issue will be the same with respect to our practice. It is easier for men, when once they have a notion of a perfect righteous Being, to consider, in particular cases, what such a Being would do or approve, than to run up

in an abstracted way of reasoning to first principles and maxims for direction. But whichever way you take, the inquiry is the same, namely, what is fit and reasonable to be done in this or that case: and let the method of inquiry be what it will, the judgment must be such as our present share of reason will enable us to make. And therefore the imitation of God is a principle of religion arising from and depending on the right use and exercise of reason, as much as any other whatever. And this may serve to show on what foundation the imitation of God stands in natural religion, and how we may apply this principle for our direction in particular cases. It may show also what is to be understood by being perfect, as God is perfect: it is absurd to aim at the measure of his perfection; but we are then, to all the purposes of life and religion, perfect as he is perfect, when we do nothing but what he will approve: for to stand approved in the eye of an all-perfect and holy Being, is the true perfection of every creature. This is the Christian excellency, as described by St. Paul in the words once already quoted, and with which I shall conclude this discourse, 'That we may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XLVI.

JOHN, CHAP. III.—VERSE 19.

It is shown that man being a reasonable creature, and enabled to choose for himself in all cases, it is contrary to nature to suppose that there should be any thing absolutely or necessarily good to him; since the advantage to be drawn from any thing depends on the right use of it. Wholesome food is good for the sound; but taken in undue measure, it creates disease. Physic is proper for the sick; but if not properly regulated, it might destroy instead of curing. As it is with the body, so it is with the mind. The best instructions are of no use unless attended to. If there were any system of religion pretending by uncontrollable power to make men righteous, it might be considered as a good piece of spiritual mechanism, but not as a rule of virtue, since there can be no morality without free will. Hence it follows that the religion designed for us as free agents, can only instruct us in such a manner that we may not err through ignorance, and so aid us that it may be in our power, whenever it is in our will, to obey. That religion must therefore be the best, which most fully enlightens our understanding, and is best calculated to remove those impediments to liberty and freedom which arise from the corruption of our nature. There are but two sorts of men that can hope to escape punishment: the righteous, who have no reason to fear judgment, and the sinners who offend through ignorance. The declaration in the text therefore is only a natural consequence drawn from the excellency of the gospel and the perverseness of men. If the gospel were less perfect or less known, sinners would have more

to plead in their own behalf; as it is, they have no excuse for disobedience: if it were only a matter of advice, they might be pardoned for neglecting it. But as it is a law given by God to his creatures, if we do not walk in the light of it, we shall be condemned for seeking darkness rather than light. This meaning of the text is confirmed by other parts of Scripture: it will be shown that men continue in darkness rather than light, only because their deeds are evil. The declaration of our Saviour, Mark xvi. 16. having reference to the preaching of the gospel throughout the world, it is evident that the believers and unbelievers there spoken of are such only as have had the gospel preached to them. St. Paul speaks to the same purpose, Acts xvii. 30; where the command to repent being opposed to God's winking at the times of ignorance, shows that now it is at every man's peril if he refuses to hearken to the heavenly call. The same is to be learned from Rom. i. 16. 18.: so that revelation, as it affords help to those who embrace it, at the same time renders all ungodliness inexcusable. There are many texts in Scripture to this effect, and our Saviour, in Luke x., speaks so clearly of those who despise the gospel, that his words can only be thus explained. It is not left to our choice whether we will be subject to the gospel or no; and this is not peculiar to the gospel, but is the case with regard to the laws of the realm, and all laws founded on sufficient authority: and if this be the case in human laws, it is much more so in those of divine origin: for the greater the authority of the lawgiver, the more absolute must be our obedience. Hence appears the insufficiency of that argument for Deism which men make who affect to discard the gospel, in order to preserve the moral law of reason and nature: for they manifestly reject the authority of God, and refuse that obedience which reason teaches to be due to the Lawgiver of the world. Such pretences are of little weight, since the gospel being the true light to direct us, the only reason for forsaking it must be that assigned in the text.

The avowed design of our Saviour's coming was to destroy the works of the devil, and to restore religion, as it respects God and man, to its native purity. His first lesson to the world was the necessity of repentance: the laws of his gospel are declaratory of the original law of reason and nature: the mysteries therein revealed to us are intended only to give us the assurance of his pardon and mercy, and raise us to a lively hope of life and immortality through faith and obedience. The institutions of the gospel, as baptism, the Lord's supper, &c. are set before us as the proper means to enable us to make our calling and election sure, by continuing steadfast in holiness; and what is it that can tempt a man to reject a religion so well adapted to serve all the good ends of living here, and to support our hopes of happiness hereafter? We cannot pretend to forsake the gospel, in order to secure an obedience to the moral law by better hopes or stronger fears; since the gospel has taken in all the hopes and fears of nature, and confirmed them by the irreversible decree of God, *who hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world by the man Christ Jesus.* Do we recur to the light of nature in order to learn what is acceptable to God, and what are the relative duties between man and man? In the gospel we shall find all the moral duties deduced from the two great principles of nature, love of God and of our neighbor. There is no precept of virtue laid down in the gospel which nature can reject; and none in nature that has not been enforced in the gospel. Many have complained that the terrors of the Lord, set forth in the gospel, are too rigid and severe; and many have lamented the strictness of the gospel morality: but did any one ever forsake the gospel, that he might become more perfect than the laws of Christ required he should be? If not, we may judge what purposes he serves who endeavors to bring down the precepts of morality from the strictness of the gospel, to give mankind greater licence; and to weaken the restraint laid on us by the terrors of the Christian law, by discarding the fears of per-

petual punishment. Is it likely that the world will become better when less holiness is required, or when the danger of sinning is lessened? and yet this is pretended by those who forsake the gospel in search, as they say, of a better, but in reality of an easier form of religion. The reason assigned in the text is the only true cause of their aversion to the light which is held forth to them. Some have made objections to the mysteries of the gospel; and to those institutions of it which cannot reasonably be considered a part of true religion. It is true the gospel has taught us many things which by nature we could not know; but they are all designed to strengthen our hope and assurance of God's mercy: and those institutions, which in their own nature are not constituent parts of religion, are necessary to supply us with spiritual strength; and they were given by our Saviour, who, seeing, from the weakness of our nature, that we could not alone resist evil, mercifully granted us the assistance of his holy spirit. The gospel being recommended to us as founded in the express revelation of God, carries with it such authority as cannot with safety be either despised or neglected. We must therefore consider the necessity of impartially examining its claims to divine authority: since if it be the word of God, it is death to forsake it. Religion, properly so called, admits of no choice; in all the essential parts of it we must either obey or perish. But the corruption of man making it necessary for God to interpose by a new declaration of his will, the only dispute is of the truth of this revelation. If it indeed comes from God, it cannot be safe to reject it. This matter therefore, of all others, requires our most serious consideration; for if we wantonly or perversely refuse the gift of God, the words of the text will be our condemnation.

DISCOURSE XLVI.

JOHN, CHAP. III.—VERSE 19.

This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

MAN being a reasonable creature, and endued with faculties to judge and choose for himself in all cases, it is contrary to nature to suppose that there should be any thing absolutely or necessarily good to him; since the advantage to be drawn from any thing whatever depends on the right use and application of that thing to its proper ends and purposes. Wholesome food is good for the sound; but if taken in undue measure, it grows into a disease. Physic is proper for the sick; but if the patient will not submit to proper regulations, that which might have been his cure will certainly be his destruction.

As it is with respect to the body, so is it likewise with respect to the mind; there is no such thing as an absolute or necessary cure for the frailties and infirmities of it; but the properest method for attaining that end must still depend on the proper use and application of it. The best instructions are of no use whilst not attended to; and the greatest helps and assistances yield no profit as long as they are rejected and despised.

Were the case otherwise, that is, were there any system of religion pretending, in virtue of some uncontrollable power, to make men righteous, such a system might be valued as a good piece of spiritual mechanism; but it could never be considered as a rule of virtue and morality, since the operation of the will being excluded, the morality of all human actions would be excluded with it.

And hence it follows that the utmost that can be done for

us in religion, is so to instruct us that we may not err for want of knowlege of our duty, and so to aid and assist us, that it may be in our power, whenever it is in our will, to obey. Any thing beyond this is inconsistent with reason and freedom, and therefore can have no part in a religion designed for the government of rational free agents. And this being the case, that must in the comparison be judged to be the best religion, which does most fully enlighten our understanding, and which does in the most perfect manner restore us to our liberty and freedom, by removing the impediments which arise from the weakness and corruption of our nature. All who live under the influence of such a religion as this, as they have a certain way to happiness marked out for them, if they choose to walk in it, so are they certainly doomed to condemnation on their disobedience. For there are but two sorts of men who can hope to escape punishment; the righteous, who have no reason to fear judgment, and the sinners, who offending through ignorance or weakness, have some plea to make for mercy and forgiveness. But the sinners who knew their duty, and were so assisted as to have been able, had they been but willing, to perform it, have nothing to expect but condemnation. What the Apostle therefore in the text has declared to us, is no more than a natural consequence drawn from the excellency of the gospel, and the perverseness of men, considered together: 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.' Were the gospel less perfect than it is, or less known to the world, sinners would have more to plead in their own behalf: but since they want no light to direct them, no assistance to support them in doing their duty, they are left without excuse for their disobedience. The gospel, which was given to them for life and salvation, will be their judgment and condemnation; and the fault is all their own: they have as little reason to complain of the gospel religion on this account, as the dying patient has of the physician, whose wholesome medicines he wantonly abused to his own destruction. Were the gospel merely a matter of advice, which men might follow or let alone as they found most convenient for their own purposes, they would then have less to answer for if they neglected it. But

the gospel is a law proceeding from the best and highest authority, given by God to his creatures; and we are bound at our peril to take notice of it: if we will not walk in the light of God's law, when it shines so brightly before our eyes, we shall be condemned for choosing darkness rather than light. This is the meaning of the text, which I shall therefore, in the first place, endeavor to confirm from other passages of holy writ; and shall then show you that there can be no reason assigned why men make this perverse choice of continuing in darkness rather than light, but this only, 'because their deeds are evil.'

When our blessed Lord commissioned his Apostles to preach the gospel throughout the world, he declared at the same time, that 'he that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.' Which declaration having manifestly a reference to the precept foregoing, of preaching the gospel in all the world, it is evident that the believers and unbelievers here spoken of, are such only as have had the gospel preached to them. And therefore this text administers no occasion to inquire into the circumstances of such as have never had the gospel published to them: much less does it determine peremptorily any thing concerning them: but as to those to whom the grace of God has been tendered by the preaching of the ministers of Christ, their case is fully stated and determined by our blessed Lord; 'He that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.'

To the same purpose speaketh St. Paul in his sermon to the men at Athens, in which he thus declares his sense with regard to the times before the gospel and the times since: 'And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent.' Where the command to repent being opposed to God's winking at the times of ignorance, plainly shows, that from the going forth of the command to repent, God will no longer wink at the ignorance of the world; and therefore it is at every man's peril, if he refuses to hearken to the heavenly call.

In like manner does the same Apostle deliver himself in his Epistle to the Romans, chap. i. 16. 'The gospel,' he tells us, 'is the power of God unto salvation to every one that be-

lieveth.' He tells us also, ver. 18. 'That the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.' So that the revelation, as it affords all help and assistance to such as are willing to do the works of righteousness, and embrace the offers of peace, so does it render all ungodliness inexcusable, leaving men no pretence, either from ignorance or weakness, to cover their iniquity.

Out of the many texts of Scripture which speak to the same purpose, I shall select but one testimony more, and shall go back for that to the early dawnings of the gospel. When our Lord sent forth his twelve Apostles to preach to the Jews only, he thus instructs them: 'When ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come on it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of the house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.' In which words our blessed Lord so plainly speaks his mind, with respect to those who neglect and despise the gospel, that they will hardly admit of any farther explication.

On the whole it appears that it is not left to every man's choice, whether he will be subject to the gospel or no; for subject he shall be, so as to be intitled to the rewards of it for his obedience, or to the punishments of it for his disobedience. And this is not a circumstance particular to the gospel only, but common to all laws founded on sufficient authority. No man is at liberty to choose whether he will be governed by the laws of the realm; and it would be to little purpose to plead to an indictment, that you never intended to be governed by the law, but choose to act by other rules; and therefore desire that the law may have no place in the judgment, but that you may be tried by those rules by which you choose to live. The authority of the lawgiver cuts off such pleas; and since you owed submission to such authority, your refusing to pay it will be justly taken as the aggravation, not as the excuse of your crime. If this be the case in human laws, it is much more so in those of divine original: for the greater the authority of the lawgiver is, the more absolute must our obedience and submis-

sion be. And if this be just reasoning, it may appear perhaps that the pretence for Deism, which at present seems to be the most plausible, will in the end be its greatest aggravation. For though, when men discard the gospel out of a zeal to preserve the moral law of reason and nature, they may seem to act with great regard to virtue and holiness, yet do they manifestly reject the authority of God, and deliberately refuse that obedience, which reason teaches to be due to the great Lawgiver of the world. But these pretences, considered in themselves, will be found to have little weight; since, the gospel being the truest light to direct us, men can have no reason to forsake it, but this only which is assigned in the text, 'because their deeds are evil.'

The avowed design of our blessed Saviour's coming into the world was to destroy the works of the devil, and to restore religion, both as it respects God and man, to its native purity and simplicity. The first great lesson he taught the world was repentance from dead works, in order to qualify them to become members of the kingdom of heaven. The laws of his gospel are declaratory of the original law of reason and nature, and contain the fairest copy of it, purged from all the corruptions that darkened and obscured its beauty. All the mysteries and secret purposes of God, which are revealed to us, are intended only to give us the comfort and assurance of God's mercy and pardon of our past transgressions, and to raise us to a lively hope of life and immortality through faith and obedience. All the institutions of the gospel, such as baptism, the Lord's supper, and the like, are set before us as the proper means to enable us to make our calling and election sure, by continuing steadfast in the works of holiness. And what is it that can tempt a man to reject a religion so excellently well adapted to serve all the good ends of living in this world, and to support the hopes of living happily in that which is to come? Is it your concern to reform mankind, and to restrain those evil inclinations, which make this world a scene of misery? Is it for this purpose that you search the inward sentiments of nature, and from thence set forth the hopes and fears of a future judgment to be a bridle on the unruly passions of men? Search the gospel, and you will find all the hopes and fears of nature

displayed in their fullest light, and supported by the express revelation of God, who raised his own Son from the dead, to give us the assurance of a resurrection either to life or death eternal, according to the things done in the body. You cannot therefore pretend to forsake the gospel, in order to secure an obedience to the moral law by better hopes or stronger fears; since the gospel has taken in all the hopes and fears of nature, and confirmed them by the irreversible decree of God, 'who hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world by the man Christ Jesus.'

Is it for instruction that you recur to the light of nature? Would you thence learn the true notions of virtue and justice, and see the image of holiness in its native purity, stripped of the false ornaments and disguises of superstition and ignorance? Would you know what is the pure and acceptable service to be paid to the great Creator, or what are the just bounds and limits of the relative duties between man and man? Look into the gospel, and there you will find all the moral duties fairly transcribed, and deduced from the two great principles of nature, the love of God, and the love of your neighbor. There you may be instructed how to worship God in spirit and in truth, and how to love your brother without dissimulation. There is no precept of virtue laid down in the gospel which nature can reject; there is none which nature teaches, that the gospel has not explained and enforced. You cannot therefore forsake the gospel, in hopes of finding a purer religion elsewhere.

Many have complained that the terrors of the Lord, set forth in the gospel of Christ, are too rigid and severe, and hardly reconcileable with the benignity of the divine nature; and have therefore sought to screen themselves under a milder sentence, denounced, as they think, by the voice of reason and nature: but did you ever hear that any one rejected the gospel, that he might secure the practice of virtue on a foundation of better hopes and fears, that should with a more powerful influence subdue the minds of men to the obedience of holiness? Many have lamented the strictness of the gospel morality, the laws of which require so great perfection, that man must hardly hope to attain to it; and have therefore recurred to the law of

nature, not as a more perfect, but as a more equitable rule of justice; hoping to find, under the protection of nature, that liberty and allowance to their infirmities, which the gospel has precluded. But do you know the man that ever despised the gospel for the immorality of its precepts, or left it that he might be more chaste, more temperate, more charitable, than the laws of Christ required he should be? If not, let any one judge what purposes a man serves, when he endeavors, on one side, to bring down the precepts of morality from the strictness of the gospel, and to give greater liberty and freedom to the inclinations of the world; and, on the other side, to weaken the restraints laid on the passions by the terrors of the Christian law, by discarding the fears of perpetual punishment. Is the cause of religion to be thus supported? Will the world be better, when less holiness is required of them, and when even what is required becomes less necessary to be performed, by removing the danger of transgressing? Is it for the sake of virtue that men plead the cause of libertinism, and endeavor to make void those laws of Christ, which are most uneasy to flesh and blood? Is it to make men better than they are, that you tell them the danger of sinning is less than they apprehend, much less than the rigor of the gospel declares it to be? And yet these are the views on which those act, who retreat from the gospel with the greatest show of reason and moderation: these are the pretences of such as would not be thought to throw off all regard to religion, but only to seek a better, I doubt they mean an easier form. And what is it that creates the aversion to the light which is held forth to them, and makes them choose to retire, if not to the total darkness of heathenish ignorance, yet to the shades of natural religion, if not this which the text has assigned, 'because their deeds are evil?' You may think perhaps that I have forgot one great objection which such men have against the gospel, and which may be entertained without supposing their deeds to be evil; namely, that they cannot be reconciled to the mysteries of the gospel, or to those institutions of it, which are on no foot of reason any part of true religion. In answer to which I can only say at present, that those who make the objection are either not in earnest, or else they are unacquainted with the power of the gospel. It is true, the

gospel has taught us things which by nature we could not know; but they are all designed to confirm and strengthen our hope in God, and to give us the fullest assurance of his mercy. It is true also, that there are in the gospel some institutions, which in their own nature are no constituent parts of religion; but then they are such only as are necessary to enable us to do our duty by conveying new supplies of spiritual strength to us, for want of which we were unable, in the state of nature, to extricate ourselves from the bonds of iniquity. These are the additions which the gospel has made to religion. Our blessed Saviour saw that the hopes of nature were obscured, and therefore he did, by wonderful revelations, bring life and immortality to light again: he saw that her powers were decayed, so that she could not resist evil, and therefore he supplied the defect by the assistance of his holy spirit. If you are not willing to reap the benefit, at least forgive his kindness; and do not think the worse of him, or his religion, because of the great provision he has made in it for your security. But I hasten to a conclusion, and shall but briefly apply what has been said on this subject.

What I would chiefly suggest to your consideration is this: that the gospel of Jesus Christ being recommended to you, as founded in the express revelation of God, carries with it such an authority as cannot with safety to yourselves be despised or neglected. It is not an indifferent matter whether you receive it or no; for if the gospel be truly what it is said to be, whether you will receive it, or whether you reject it, you shall most certainly be judged by the tenor of it. I do not propose this consideration as necessarily determining your choice to the gospel, since the pretences of the gospel to divine authority still lie under your examination: but thus far the consideration goes, to show you how necessary it is to deal in this matter with all sincerity and truth, and to try the cause impartially; since, if the gospel be the word of God, it is death to forsake it. It is want of reflexion that makes men think religion is a thing so perfectly in their own power, that they may choose where and how they please, without being accountable for the choice they make, provided only they live up to the terms of it. For in truth religion, properly and

strictly so called, admits of no choice: it does not lie before you to consider whether you shall love God or no, or whether you shall love your neighbor or no: you have no choice whether you will be sober, temperate, and chaste, or otherwise; for in these essential parts of religion you must either obey or perish. But the weakness and corruption of man making it necessary for God to interpose by a new declaration of his will, the only dispute is of the truth and authority of this new declaration. If it indeed comes from God, it cannot be safe to reject it; and whether it does or no, it is absurd to reject it without weighing its merit. This therefore is, of all others, the most weighty and serious matter, and requires the exercise of your most composed thoughts. For if you wantonly or perversely refuse the gift of God, this will be your condemnation, 'that light is come into the world, and you loved darkness rather than light.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XLVII.

JOHN, CHAP. V.—VERSE 44.

THE chief exercise of reason consists in so regulating our actions as to make them subservient to the end we purpose to attain. All men have something which is the object of their desires; though few choose well, and fewer still wisely pursue the good they choose: if we choose ill, the greater the ability with which we strive to compass our designs, the more certain is our ruin: the best actions directed to ill purposes become criminal: nothing is more commendable than a spirit of beneficence; but where the appearance of it is assumed merely to promote our own selfish designs, what is it but fraud and deceit? This is peculiarly applicable to religion. The man, who under the disguise of religion seeks only his own interest, affronts God, abuses the world, and lays up for himself certain ruin. There are degrees in this vice; and men are often influenced by it without being conscious to so much baseness, as to deserve the name of hypocrisy. Where morality and virtue are not concerned, it may perhaps be right to comply with the world; but if we allow our love of fame to influence us in religious matters, our minds will be perverted, and we shall be disabled from judging between truth and falsehood: thus it was with those whom Christ addresses in the text. He had *done among them such works as never man did*, and to these he appeals as evidence of his mission (John v. 26.): in v. 39. he appeals to the ancient Scriptures: a fairer issue could not be proposed; and we learn from St. John that it had its effect on many of the rulers among the Jews, who how-

ever kept their faith secret, loving *the praise of men more than the praise of God*: which words express also the sense of the text. It is shown that, as religion arises from the relation we bear to God, and respects him only; when it is made to regard other objects, it necessarily becomes either idolatry or hypocrisy. It has been said that the zeal and piety of Christians fell into decay when the empire became Christian: this observation not perfectly just, as the church has, in all ages, had many faithful members. The times of persecution were calculated to afford more striking examples of zeal; but the great alteration was, that when the powers of the world came into the Church, they were followed by all such as *loved the praise of men more than the praise of God:* since which time profession has become a less certain sign of true faith: and men not being now called to the proof by others, and not readily calling themselves to a strict account, have less reason for confidence in themselves. Some rules may therefore profitably be sought by which men may judge whether they receive honor one of another, or do seek the honor which cometh from God only. In order to this it is first inquired, in what sense the text condemns the receiving honor from men: secondly, what is meant by seeking the honor which cometh from God only: thirdly, what are the marks by which men may try themselves on these articles.

I. St. Paul has given it for a rule, that we ought to *render honor to whom honor is due:* and as some degree of honor and respect is due to all men, St. Peter has given the precept in general terms, *honor all men.* All men therefore to whom honor is due, may both innocently receive and justly require it: as a father from his son, a king from his subjects, &c. But in the text, and in the parallel passage of St. John, there is evidently an opposition, between the praise of men and the praise of God. Now it is certain that no honor can be due to man which is inconsistent with the honor which we owe to

God; and we cannot be innocent while we sacrifice the good will of God to the vanity of being well spoken of in the world. Instance of Paul and Felix commented on.

II. *Them that honor me, I will honor,* saith the Lord; *and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.* The only way therefore to seek honor from God, is by paying to God the honor that is due to him. A sincere regard to truth and justice is the truest honor, indeed the only honor, we can pay to God: all external signs, though expressed in the method prescribed by himself, become empty shows, unless they proceed from an honest heart: this point enlarged on. And as it is in practical duties, so it is in faith likewise: he who professes to believe in Christ merely in compliance with the world, may obtain perhaps its riches and honors; but he has his reward; for this temporal faith will procure for him no praise or honor from God.

How differently people will act in religious matters, when they seek the praise of men, and when they seek the praise of God, may be collected from the knowlege we have of God and the world, and the measures that are necessary to please them: this however is fully shown by instances from holy Scripture.

III. Respecting self-examination. All times do not afford the same trials of faith and sincerity, yet there is no time which has not some. If persecution fails, prosperity has its temptations; and it is perhaps as hard to deny ourselves the glories and honors of the world, as it is to submit to its afflictions. St. Paul tells us, that *there must be heresies among us, that they which are approved may be made manifest:* when heathen persecutions ceased, internal divisions arose in the Church, and the powers of the empire were sometimes on one side of the controversy and sometimes on the other: what influence this had on the faith of multitudes, a moderate experience of the world may teach us. But farther; times of ease and prosperity naturally abound in vice, and a neglect of the things

pertaining to salvation; and it is counted a wise thing to sit still and give way to the torrent, and not to create trouble for ourselves and others by opposing a general corruption; and perhaps it may be wise: but is it wisdom towards God or towards the world? Is it seeking that honor which comes from above, or the honor which comes from men? Could the man, who so seeks it, have had courage in the day of trial and persecution?

Let us then examine ourselves on this head: if we think it a happy choice to sacrifice the honor of God and religion to a corrupt generation, and to screen ourselves from the indignation of the world by a professed indifference, is it not directly preferring the good-will of man to that of God? and can we complain, if we are left to seek our sole recompense from the world, whose servants we are? Conclusion.

DISCOURSE XLVII.

JOHN, CHAP. V.—VERSE 44.

How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?

THE chief exercise of reason consists in disposing and regulating our actions, so as to render them subservient to the end or happiness which we propose to obtain. And though perhaps, with respect to the great numbers of men in the world, but few in comparison choose well for themselves, and fewer still pursue wisely and steadily the good they choose; yet all men have something which is the object of their desires, and are endeavoring to attain their wish by some means or other. When we choose ill for ourselves, the more wit and dexterity we have to compass our designs, the nearer we are to ruin, the more inevitable is our destruction. Our best actions, when directed to ill purposes, become criminal, and leave nothing behind them but the foul stain of hypocrisy on our consciences.

This general truth might easily be illustrated by many particular instances from common life. There is nothing more commendable than a spirit of beneficence, and an inclination to do good to our fellow-creatures: but when the air of beneficence is assumed merely to carry on private views, when an inclination to do good is professed only to promote our own designs, and to make our way the easier to wealth or honor, what is it but fraud and deceit?

If civil virtue thus loses its name and nature by being misapplied, religion does so much more. The man who aims at reputation and interest under the disguise of religion, affronts God and abuses the world, and lays up for himself certain

ruin, the just reward of those who have 'the form of godliness, denying the power thereof.'

But there are degrees in this vice as in most other, and men oftentimes act under the influence of it without being conscious to themselves of so much baseness, as deserves to be branded with the name of hypocrisy. Pride, vanity, and self-love naturally give a tincture of hypocrisy to men's behavior; they lead them to conceal whatever the world dislikes, and to make a show of whatever the world honors and admires. In the common affairs of life, where virtue and morality are not directly concerned, it may be very right perhaps to comply with the world; but when our vanity, and love of praise and reputation, come to influence us in matters of religion, they will ever give a wrong turn to our minds, and disable us from doing justice to our own reason in judging between truth and falsehood.

This was the case of those to whom our Saviour in the text applies himself: he had 'done among them such works as never man did:' to these he appeals as an evidence that he came from the Father: 'The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.' He appeals likewise to the ancient Scriptures, those oracles of God, committed to the Jews: 'Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.' If ye suspect that I have any views or designs of my own, and that I speak in the name of God without his commission, look to the works which I do; the blind receive their sight, the dumb their speech, the sick and lame are made sound, the dead are restored to life. His servant I am, whose works these are; and do ye yourselves judge from what hand these mighty things do proceed. If you think that I am come to pervert the law and the prophets, let the law and the prophets judge between us: I claim no more authority than they give me: search therefore the Scriptures and see. A fairer issue could not be proposed; so fair it was, that it had its full effect on many of the first rank among the Jews. St. John tells us, that 'among the chief rulers many believed on him;' but they made a secret of their conviction, and kept it to themselves, for fear of being

put out of the synagogue: 'for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.' Which last words are parallel to those of the text, and express the same sense. A concern to be well with the people made some incapable of conviction, and made others, notwithstanding the conviction they were under, dissemble their real sentiments, and reject the authority to which in their own minds they could not but assent.

If we consider the nature of religion, it will appear to us why this is and must be the case. Religion arises from the relation we bear to God, and him only it does respect; and therefore when it is made to regard other objects, it necessarily becomes either idolatry or hypocrisy. He who serves any other than the God who made him, is an idolater: he who serves God with a design to please men rather than God, is an hypocrite. And since the end we propose to ourselves will always influence us in the choice of the means, whoever proposes to please the world by his religion will certainly choose such a religion as the world approves. Such an inquirer can have no regard for truth, for he takes his direction from the opinion of the world: he concerns not himself to know whether Jesus Christ be a prophet approved of God; he considers only whether he is approved by the people. It is an old and a very common observation, that the zeal and piety of Christians fell into decay when the empire became Christian. I am willing to think that the observation is not quite just, and to hope that those who were before pious believers, continued so after this great change, and that the Church has, in all ages since, had many faithful members. But true it is, that, when the powers of the empire were converted to Christ, true believers had a calmer passage through the world, and left not behind them such shining examples of their zeal as the times of persecution always afforded. But the great and visible alteration was, that when the powers of the world came into the Church, they were followed by all such as 'loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.' Whoever professed himself a Christian in the times of trial and persecution, gave to others great evidence of his being a sincere believer, and had great ground of confidence in himself that his heart was right with God: but since the days of prosperity, pro-

fession is become a less certain sign of true faith; and men, not being called to the proof by others, nor very readily calling themselves to a strict account, have less reason for confidence and assurance in themselves. The time therefore may be profitably employed in finding some rules by which men may examine themselves, and judge whether they receive honor one of another, or do seek the honor which cometh from God only. In order to this, I shall inquire,

First, in what sense 'the receiving honor from men' is condemned in the text.

Secondly, what is meant by 'seeking the honor which cometh from God only.'

Thirdly, what are the marks by which men may try themselves on these articles.

First, I shall inquire in what sense 'the receiving honor from men' is condemned in the text.

The Apostle St. Paul has given it for a rule, that we ought to 'render honor to whom honor is due:' and as some degree of honor and respect is due to all men, St. Peter has given the precept in general terms, 'Honor all men.' Since then all men are obliged to pay this due, most certain it is, that all to whom 'honor is due' may very innocently receive it; nay farther, they may very justly expect and require it. A father from his son, a master from his servant or scholar, a king from his subjects, all who are in authority from those under them, have a right to demand the respect and honor that is due to their respective stations and characters. Besides, men who stand in none of these relations to us, have often a just title to respect and honor from us on account of their present qualifications; as learning, virtue, and wisdom, ought to be respected wherever they are found. Since then all honor that is due must be paid, and may be received, it is evident that the honor mentioned in the text is such as is due to no man, and which for that reason ought never to be paid nor received.

It is very evident that, in the text, and in the parallel place of St. John already quoted, there is an opposition between the praise of men and the praise of God; and that the Jews are condemned, as preferring the praise and good will of men to the praise and good will of God. Now certain it is, that

no honor can be due to man, that is inconsistent with the honor which we owe to God; and we cannot be innocent, whilst we sacrifice the good will of God to the vanity of being well spoken of in the world. When men act contrary to the truth and their known duty, in compliance with the world, it is plain they are more concerned for their interest with the world than for their interest with God; and this is, in the language of our Saviour, 'to receive honor one from another, and to neglect the honor which cometh from God only.' We have an instance of this conduct in the twenty-fourth of the Acts; 'As Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.' You see the natural working of conscience, and the power of conviction: a sober, serious discourse on the great fundamental points of religion threw the governor into a fit of trembling, and made him unable to bear the presence of his prisoner. Had this light been cherished and encouraged, what noble fruits might it have produced! But the love of the world prevailed: the governor often communed with St. Paul, but it was in hopes of getting money of him for his release. When this hope failed, he permitted the preacher of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, to continue in prison two years; and when he left the government, 'he left Paul bound, being willing,' as the text expresses it, 'to show the Jews a pleasure.' You see what place the honor of God had in this man's affections: he would have sold both God and the people for money; but when no money was to be had, he chose rather to please the people than God: and therefore sacrificed his innocent prisoner, whom in justice he ought to have set free, to the prejudices and resentments of the Jewish nation. Many denied Christ, for the same reason that Felix left St. Paul bound, 'that they might show the people a pleasure,' and thereby become acceptable to them. Truth and justice must always suffer, as long as men determine their choice by considerations of their temporal interest. These considerations are so apt to overbear the judgment, that our Saviour speaks of them in the text as if they put men under a moral impossibility of acknowleging the truth: 'How can ye believe, who receive honor

one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?'

Secondly, we are to inquire what is meant by 'seeking the honor which cometh from God only.'

'Them that honor me, I will honor,' saith the Lord; 'and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.' The only way therefore to seek honor from God, is by paying to God the honor that is due to him. A sincere regard to truth and justice is the truest honor, indeed the only honor we can pay to God. All external signs of regard to God, though expressed in the very method prescribed by himself, become empty shows, unless they proceed from an honest heart. Under the law, circumcision was the seal of the covenant; and under the gospel, baptism succeeds in its place. They were both ordained by God; yet of the first St. Paul has said, 'He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.' And of the second St. Peter has said, 'Baptism doth now save us; not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God.' But this matter is directly considered and settled by our blessed Lord in his sermon on the mount. In treating on the great duties of religion, almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, he expounds to us what it is to seek the praise of men, and what to seek the praise of God, and sets before us the consequences on both sides. 'Take heed,' says he, 'that you do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, himself shall reward them openly.' The like injunctions he gives us with respect to prayer and fasting; and shows us in every instance, that to have regard to men, and the good opinion of the world, in the performing of religious

duties, will intitle us to no higher a reward than the praise of men. God will not hold himself obliged, nor can he in justice be thought obliged, to reward those works which are offered up as an incense to the world, without regard or respect to himself. If we seek the praise of God, we must consider only what will please him, and put the world quite out of the question.

As it is in practical duties, so is it in faith likewise: he who professes to believe in Christ merely because the world about him is in the same profession, may obtain perhaps the ease, the honors, or the riches which he aims at; and let him make the most of them, he has his reward; for his temporal faith will procure him no praise or honor from God. If you choose a religion with an intention to save your soul, you must choose that which will render you most acceptable to God, however it may expose you to the frowns of the world. Thus it is you must 'seek the honor which cometh from God only.'

How differently men will act in matters of religion, when they seek the praise of men, and when they seek the praise of God, may easily be collected from the knowlege we have of God and the world, and the measures that are necessary to please them; but I choose to place it before you in some instances recorded in Scripture. We read in the seventh of St. John, that 'many of the people believed on Jesus, and said, When Christ cometh, shall he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?' The Pharisees were alarmed at this defection of the people; and to prevent the growth of the evil, they with the chief priests send officers to seize our Lord; but the officers, instead of bringing their prisoner, return full of admiration of him and his doctrine, and tell their masters, 'That never man spake like this man.' The Pharisees found their officers were become believers, and they reproved them, saying, 'Are ye also deceived?' But the only argument they gave them was this, 'Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? But this people, who knoweth not the law, are cursed.' What conviction this argument produced we know not; silence it produced at least, for we hear of no reply that the officers made. In the twelfth of St. John we read that among the chief rulers many believed on Christ, but they did

not confess him; and here the reason is given, they were afraid 'lest they should be put out of the synagogue.'

On the other side, when the Apostles Peter and John were in custody, and under examination of the chief rulers, and were commanded to teach no more in the name of Jesus, they answered boldly, 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.' This difference of behavior is plainly accounted for in the text. Peter and John considered what was right in the sight of God; the believing rulers thought on their interest in the synagogue, and considered what was right in the sight of men: one sought the praise of God, the other the praise of men. How different were their principles and their actions; how different also their rewards! The dissimulation of the Jews preserved to them a place in the synagogue; the generous confession of the Apostles will give them a place that shall abide for ever in glory and immortality. I proceed now to consider,

Thirdly, how we may examine ourselves on this subject, and know whether we receive honor from men, or seek the honor that comes from God only.

All times do not afford the same trials of faith and sincerity, yet there is no time but has some. If persecution ceases, prosperity has its temptations; and it is perhaps as hard to deny ourselves the honors and glories of the world, as it is to submit to the afflictions of it. St. Paul tells us, that 'there must be heresies among us, that they which are approved may be made manifest.' When the heathens could no longer exercise their cruelty against Christians, the external peace of the church was followed by internal divisions and contentions. The great Arian controversy arose much about the time that the empire became Christian, and it yielded as severe trials to Christians as they had ever before experienced. The powers of the empire were sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other side of the controversy. What influence it had on the faith of the world, a man of very moderate experience in the world may easily collect. I will not carry this observation into particular instances, or bring it any nearer to our own times, than by reminding you that every age has afforded this trial to Christians; and there

always is and will be reason for men, who would guard the sincerity of their hearts, to inquire how far they lean to the world, and court its favors, by the opinions which they embrace and profess under the appearance of religion. Whether your opinion be true or false, yet if you maintain it in compliment to the world, you know your reward; the world must pay you: your Father, who seeth in secret, has no reward for such believers. What the portion of those must be who are resolved, at all adventures, to be well with the world, and to give no offence either to the great or to the wicked by their virtue or religion, our Saviour has plainly told us, 'Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you.'

But farther: times of ease and prosperity, though attended with no other evil, yet naturally abound in vice, and a neglect of the things pertaining to salvation; and it is counted a very wise thing to sit still, and give way to the torrent, and not to create ourselves and others trouble by opposing a general corruption: and perhaps it may be wise. But, I beseech you, is it wisdom towards God, or wisdom towards the world? Is it seeking that honor which comes from above, or the honor which comes from men? Can you imagine that the man who has not courage enough to venture a little of his ease and worldly tranquillity by expressing his resentment at the corruptions that surround him, would have resolution enough to expose his life in a day of trial for the sake of the religion which he professes?

Let us examine ourselves on this head: if we think it an happy choice to sacrifice the honor of God and of religion to a corrupt generation, and to screen ourselves from the indignation of the world by a professed indifference, is it not directly preferring the good will of men to the good will of God? And can we complain if we are left to seek our recompense from the world, whose servants we are?

In a word; whenever men act in opposition to the truth, or dissemble the truth in compliance with the world; when they wink at iniquity, and make a way for it to escape with impunity; when they give credit to vice and irreligion by a professed indifference, and help to establish iniquity by affecting to seem

easy and contented under the growth of it; in all these cases, the words of the text belong to them: 'They receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor which cometh from God only.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XLVIII.

MARK, CHAP. VIII.—VERSE 38.

THE text shown to relate immediately to the times of persecution, and to express the duty of a Christian whenever God's providence may call him to such a trial. This is not our case at present; yet an adulterous and sinful generation has more ways than one of making men ashamed of Christ and of his words: and if the temptation to this crime be now less than in times of affliction, the guilt is greater. In order that men may easily examine their own consciences on this head, and avoid the evil, two inquiries are made: I. into the nature of the crime *of being ashamed of Christ and of his words:* II. into the several temptations that lead to it.

I. The duty opposed to this crime is expressed in the language of Scripture, by *confessing Christ before men;* and therefore *to be ashamed of Christ and of his words,* is to deny or disown him and his doctrine before men. In this language both parts are expressed in the 10th chapter of St. Matthew. There have not been wanting some, in all times, to justify the prudence of concealing our religious sentiments, and living well with the world. They call on us to remember that religion is internal in the heart, and not on the tongues or in the lips of men; that our virtue and obedience will be estimated by our integrity, and not by outward show and profession; and that, as the world has nothing to do with our hearts, we owe it no account of our religion. To this plea another is added; that to suppose it necessary for men to own their religious sen-

timents at the peril of their lives, is making God a very hard master, requiring of us a service of no value to him, at the expense of all that is dear and valuable to us in the world. These excuses are founded in ignorance of the nature of religion, and of the great ends to be served by it. Were we to estimate our religion by the service or benefit done to God, we might part with it all at once; he gets no more by the sincerity of our hearts than by our outward professions: but if it be supposed that there is something in inward sincerity which is agreeable in his sight, and renders men acceptable to him, it must surely be thought that hypocrisy and dissimulation with the world are odious and detestable to him: this point enlarged on. But it may perhaps be asked, how comes it to be necessary for a man to say any thing about his religion? how comes the confession of it to be made a term of salvation in the gospel? and what right has the world to make any inquiry?

To answer this, we must consider the nature of religion, and the ends proposed to be served by it. When God made us reasonable creatures, he made us capable of knowing and obeying him. The great character in which he appears to us as governor of the world, is one which demands our obedience: religion therefore cannot be merely a secret concern between God and every man's conscience, since it respects him in so public a character; and it is impossible to pay him proper respect and obedience, if we deny him in the face of the world. Moreover, if any religious obedience be due to God, as governor of the world, it must principally consist in promoting the great end of his government: but whoever teaches and encourages men to deny that God is governor of the world, which every one does who refuses to own him as such, does effectually disturb the end of his government. Again, if it be really, as it is, impossible for us to do God any private service, it is very absurd to imagine that religion can consist, or be preserved by any secret belief or opinion, how cordially

soever embraced. What thanks can be due to us for silently believing God to be the governor of the world, whilst we openly deny it, and in our actions disclaim it? Even this principle, which is the foundation of all religion, has nothing of religion in it so long as it is inactive; much less when we openly deny it, and in words and actions disclaim it: this point enlarged on. Lastly, if it be any part of religion to promote religion and the knowlege of God's truth in the world, it cannot be consistent with our duty to deny our faith; especially when we see how infectious example is.

Hence then we may conclude that it is part of every man's religion to own the faith and hope that is in him; that it is absurd to rely on a secret faith which is of no use to him who keeps it secret; and whenever such faith is openly contradicted or denied, it may aggravate, but can never atone for the hypocrisy.

Hitherto the argument has been drawn from the nature of religion in general, and the question referred to the denying of God and his truth. The text indeed speaks particularly of being ashamed of Christ and of his word: but to every believer in Christ and in his words, the arguments already used are directly applicable.

One thing more may be observed, that there are in this, as in other crimes, different degrees: while some were contented to dissemble their acquaintance with Christ, St. Peter openly denied him, and confirmed it with an oath. Among us some openly blaspheme him; others make a sport of his religion; and a third sort profess a pleasure in such conversation, though their hearts ache for their iniquity; but they want courage to rebuke the sin of the scorner. All these are in the number of those who are ashamed of Christ; and to all these it shall be one day said, *I know ye not.*

II. Inquiry into the temptations which lead men to this crime.

The fountain from which they spring is plainly enough described in the text; *this adulterous and sinful generation.* And we know that there is not a fear, a passion, a weakness, or a vanity in the heart of man, but the world knows how to reach it. One distinction however must be made with respect to these temptations, that there are some which pursue us, and others which we pursue: to the one sort we unwillingly resign our faith, driven thereunto by fears and terrors, pains and torments, which we are not able to endure: but the other kind of temptations come on our invitation; and we make our faith a sacrifice to the world, when we part with it or disown it for honor, wealth, or pleasure: these are they, who, properly speaking, love the world more than God and his Christ; but they will find it a dear purchase at the last.

But whenever infidelity grows into credit and repute, and irreligion is considered as a mark of good understanding, then there arises another temptation to make men ashamed of Christ and of his word. No man likes to be despised by those around him; and he who perhaps wants neither riches nor honors, wants however to live in credit and good esteem with his acquaintance. How far this inclination must work, from motives of vanity, want of courage, and the contagion of example, may be easily conceived. But let us compare our pretended difficulties and hardships, in this respect, with those real ones which Christians of the early ages endured. If they were called to brave the sword, and look every image of death boldly in the face, shall we find pity, who are afraid only of being laughed at by those who are void of understanding?

But to come still lower: if we care not to be reprovers or rebukers of this iniquity, surely there is no necessity for us to be admirers or encouragers of it: it is no great sacrifice we make to Christ, when we resign our share of the applause which belongs to those who persecute and blaspheme him. Religion is after all our most serious concern. If its pretensions be

founded in truth, it is life to embrace them, it is death to despise them. We cannot in this case stand neuter, we cannot serve two masters. If we confess Christ before men, he will also confess us before God; and if we deny him, he will deny us at the last day.

Had our Lord been merely a teacher of good things, without any special commission from the great Creator, it would have been absurd and presumptuous in him to have arrogated to himself the high prerogative of being owned and acknowleged before men. Several have from the light of reason taught the world; but none have assumed that prerogative. The case is otherwise with our Redeemer; we must own his authority and confess him, be the danger of doing so ever so great. Whence arises this obligation? It cannot rest on his being merely a teacher of reason and good morality. We must consider then what manner of person this is who requires so much at our hands. If he be indeed the Son of God; if all power in heaven and earth be given him by the Father; if he be appointed to be the judge of all men; there is a clear reason to justify his demand and our obedience: but if he were only a teacher of morality and religion, how is he justified in pretending to be the only Son of God? &c. We must either own him under this character, or condemn him as an impostor for claiming it.

When therefore we read that our Lord requires of us to confess him before men, the true way to know what we are to confess, is to reflect on what he confessed himself; for it cannot be supposed that he would make one confession himself, and demand of his disciples and servants to make another. Let us then look into the gospel, and having read his words, weigh well these things, and judge what our duty is.

DISCOURSE XLVIII.

MARK, CHAP. VIII.—VERSE 38.

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.

At the thirty-fourth verse of this chapter our Lord, having called the people and his disciples to him, declares openly to them on what terms the profession of the gospel was to be undertaken. He allures them not by the hopes of temporal prosperity, nor promises any countenance or assistance from the great and powerful; but foretels them of the evils and calamities that should attend his followers, and of the sufferings prepared for them in this life: against which the providence of God stands not engaged for their protection; since his will is, that all the faithful should, after the example of the Author and Captain of their salvation, be made perfect through suffering. 'Whosoever,' says our Lord, 'will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' How strong the expression of 'denying himself' is, and how much it includes, we learn from the next verse, where our Saviour himself extends it even to the parting with our lives for his and the gospel's sake: 'Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.'

You see, by comparing these passages together, that the text immediately relates to the times of persecution, and expresses the duty of a Christian to resist even unto blood in maintenance of his holy religion, whenever the providence of God calls him to such trial. This indeed is not our case at present, and there-

fore I shall not spend the time in fortifying your minds against terrors, removed, I hope, at a great distance from us: but it must be owned, that an adulterous and sinful generation has more ways than one of making men ashamed of Christ and of his words. Though our eyes have not beheld any frightful scenes of persecution, yet we have seen, and daily see, many who are ashamed of Christ. If the temptation to this crime be now less than in times of distress, the guilt is certainly greater, and in equity the punishment must be so too. Which reason will bring the threatening of the text home to every man, who, in compliance with a corrupt age, does either wickedly reject, or basely dissemble, the faith of the gospel.

But that we may not rashly accuse either the age in general, or any men in particular, of this great crime, but rather open a way by which men may easily examine their own consciences on this head, and avoid the like evil for the future; let us,

First, inquire into the nature of the crime 'of being ashamed of Christ and of his words:' and,

Secondly, into the several temptations that lead to it.

The duty opposed to this crime is expressed in the language of Scripture by 'confessing Christ before men;' and therefore to be 'ashamed of Christ and of his words' is to deny or disown Christ and his doctrine before men. In this language both parts are expressed in the tenth of St. Matthew: 'whosoever,' says our Lord, 'shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.'

If we were under no obligation to confess Christ before the world, there would be no iniquity in dissembling our knowlege of him; we might keep our faith and our religion to ourselves, and by so doing avoid many inconveniences to which the open and sincere professors of the gospel are oftentimes exposed. There have not wanted some in all times, to justify the prudence of concealing our religious sentiments, and to encourage men to live well with the world, in an outward compliance with the customs and opinions of those about them, provided their hearts be right with God, and sincere in the inward belief of his truth. To support this doctrine, we are

called on to remember that religion is, in the nature of the thing, internal, and has its seat and residence in the heart, and not in the lips or tongues of men: that our virtue and obedience will be estimated by our integrity, and not by the outward shows and professions which we make: that God, who knows the heart, will judge us by it at the last: that, consequently, the only concern of religion is to purify the heart; and since the world has nothing to do with our hearts, we owe it no account of our religion; and may lawfully keep from them all knowlege in a matter where they have, where they can have, no cognisance.

To this plea another is likewise added, that to suppose it necessary for men to own the religious sentiments of their hearts at the peril of their lives, is making God a very hard master, requiring of us a service of no value, at the expense of all that is dear and valuable to us in this world. What does our confession avail him, who has a surer way of judging us than by the words of our mouth: or what does it avail the world, those especially to whom it is to be made, who are hardened and past conviction, and stand with the sword uplifted to destroy us the moment we confess the truth?

It is no wonder that flesh and blood should furnish some plausible excuses for declining a duty so very hard to practise, when it comes to the cases of the last extremity: but yet these are but excuses, and founded in ignorance of the nature of religion, and of the great ends to be served by it.

Were we to estimate our religion by the service or benefit done to God, we might part with it all at once: he gets no more by the sincerity of our hearts, than by our outward professions: and therefore on this view we may bid adieu to both. If you think, however, that there is something in inward sincerity that is agreeable in his sight, that renders men acceptable to him, I wonder, at the same time, you should not think hypocrisy and dissimulation with the world odious in his sight, and such vices as will render us detestable to him. To suppose inward sincerity consistent with an external hypocrisy toward the world, is itself a very great absurdity. For what is hypocrisy? Is it not professing one thing, and meaning another? And is not this the very case, when a man, supposed

to be right in his faith towards God, denies his faith before the world? Yes, you will say; but this is only dissembling towards the world, and not towards God. I beseech you, whence this distinction? What is dissembling towards God? Was ever any man so foolish as to imagine that he could indeed deceive God by any kind of dissimulation? No hypocrite can have this notion. If he is an Atheist, he has no thought of deceiving God, whose very being he denies. If he is not an Atheist, he must needs know so much of God, as to know it to be impossible for him to impose on God. Hypocrisy therefore has no higher aim than to deceive the world; and whoever denies the religion he believes in his heart, or professes one which he does not believe, is a formal hypocrite, and subject to all the charges and penalties brought against hypocrisy in holy writ. So that supposing a man obliged to say any thing about his religion, he must necessarily say the truth, or be liable to the pains of hypocrisy and dissimulation.

But it may be farther asked perhaps, how comes it to be necessary for a man to say any thing about his religion? How comes confession with the mouth to be made a term of salvation in the gospel? Is not religion a transaction between God and every man's own soul? how come the rest of the world then to be concerned about my religion? What right have they to inquire about it? or where is the reason, why I should be bound to inform them concerning it by an open profession of my belief?

To come to a clear resolution of this question, we must consider the nature of religion, and the ends proposed to be served by it. For if religion be nothing else but a secret transaction between God and the soul of man, no reason can be assigned why we should publish to the world an affair in which they have no concern. But the case is otherwise; for though nothing is properly religion but as it respects God, yet generally speaking, the duties of religion regard this world, and have a very great influence on the well-being of it. We must have a very strange notion of God, if we can imagine that he requires any duty of us merely for his own sake. What can he get by our service? What additional glory and honor can accrue to the eternal Godhead from our prayers or praises?

When God made us reasonable creatures, he made us capable of knowing and obeying him. The great character in which he appears to us of governor of the world, is that which demands our obedience: and consequently religion is a principle of obedience to God, as governor of the world. It cannot therefore possibly be a mere secret concern between God and every man's conscience, since it respects him in so public a character, and must extend to every thing in which God, as governor of the world, is supposed to be concerned. To deny a prince's authority in his own dominions is a degree of treason; and if religion does in truth respect God as governor of the world, to own his authority in the world must needs be the principal article of it. For surely it is impossible to pay the proper respect and obedience which is due to the governor of the world, whilst we deny him, in the face of the world, to be the governor of it. Thus from the nature of religion it appears that to profess our belief and faith in God as governor of the world is an essential article, without the observance of which we can by no means pretend to be religious.

But farther: if any religious obedience be due to God as governor of the world, it must principally consist in promoting the great end of his government. We can never be obedient subjects to any government, whilst we endeavor to disturb all the ends and designs which such government was ordained to promote. Now suppose the end of God's government of the world, with respect to the rational part of it, to be whatever your reason shall suggest to you, certain it is, that whoever teaches and encourages men to deny God to be governor of the world, and this every man does who refuses to own him as such, does, in the most effectual manner, disturb the end of his government: and this is absolutely inconsistent with religion, if religion be a principle of obedience to God as governor of the world.

Again: if it be really, as it is, impossible for us to do God any private service by which he may be the better, it is very absurd to imagine that religion can consist, or be preserved by any secret belief or opinion, how cordially soever embraced. What thanks can be due to you for silently believing God to be the governor of the world, whilst you openly deny it, and

in your actions disclaim it? Even this principle, which is the foundation of all religion, has nothing of religion in it, so long as it is inactive, and consists in speculation, without bringing forth fruits agreeable to such a persuasion; much less can it be religion, whilst you openly deny it, and in words and actions disclaim it. We can no otherwise show our love or obedience to God, than by loving our brethren; for which reason all duties of religion, though performed with the greatest regard to God, have the good of the world for their immediate object. Which is true even of those duties which seem most directly to respect the honor and glory of God; for when the honor of God is promoted in the world, happy is it for the world, for the benefit and advantage will all be their own; and God seeks to be honored that his creatures may be happy; his own happiness wants no advancement. Now if this be the true spirit of religion; if we have no way of doing honor to God but by teaching his people to know and to obey him, that they may become acceptable in his sight, and happy in his favor and protection; how is it that you conceive that there can be any religion in a secret opinion, in a dissembled faith, contradicted by an open denial of God; which truly is a dishonor to him, as it tends to make his people forget him, and render themselves miserable?

Lastly: if it be any part of religion to promote religion and the knowlege of God's truth in the world, it cannot be consistent with our duty to dissemble or to deny our faith. We see how infectious example is; and if we wanted evidence, this age should witness how catching the spirit of libertinism is. The man who hides his own religion close in his heart, tempts others, who suspect not his hypocrisy, to throw theirs quite out; and whilst he rejoices in this sheet-anchor of a pure inward faith, he sees others who steer after him make shipwreck of their faith and their salvation. And if he can in the mean time think himself innocent, and void of offence towards God and towards man, his understanding is as unaccountable as his faith.

These reasons, I think, will intitle me to conclude that it is part of every man's religion to own the faith and hope that is in him: that it is absurd to have any reliance on a secret faith,

which is of no use to him who has it, as long as it is kept secret: and whenever such faith is openly contradicted or denied, it may aggravate, but never can atone for the hypocrisy.

I have hitherto spoken in general of denying God and his truth: and have reasoned on the nature of religion in general, in order to come at my conclusion. The text indeed speaks particularly of being ashamed of Christ and of his word; but then it speaks to such as believe in Christ, for others are not liable to the charge of being ashamed of him: the very nature of the crime here mentioned supposes a faith in the gospel. Now, to every believer in Christ and in his words, the arguments already used are directly applicable. If we believe him to have received all power from the Father, and that he is our governor, and shall be our judge, there is the same reason to profess this faith, the same danger in dissembling it, as our faith in God, considered as governor of the world. If we receive the words of Christ, they are to us the truths of God, and must be professed with the same constancy, or denied with the same hazard of our salvation.

Under this head I have one thing more to observe to you, that there are in this vice, as indeed in most others, very different degrees. While some were contented to hide themselves, and dissemble their acquaintance with Christ, St. Peter openly denied him, and confirmed it with an oath, that he knew not the man. Thus some for fear in former ages, those days of persecution, denied their Lord; and some in these days, such is our unhappy case, are so vain and conceited, as to be ashamed of the Lord who bought them. Among these some openly blaspheme him; others are content to make a sport of his religion; whilst a third sort profess a pleasure in such conversation, though their hearts ache for their iniquity; but they want the courage to rebuke even by their silence the sin of the scorner. All these are in the number of those who are ashamed of Christ: to all these it shall be one day said, 'I know ye not.' For if this great woe be threatened to all such who, to save their lives, deny their Lord, and have the extremity of their case, the cruelty of their enemies, and the natural infirmities of men, to plead in their behalf; what must be their lot, who, for the same iniquity, have little more to allege than that

they did it to please an idle companion? But this consideration will meet us again under the other head, which is,

Secondly, to inquire into the several temptations which lead men to this crime of being 'ashamed of Christ, and of his words.'

The fountain from which these temptations spring is plainly enough described in the text, 'This adulterous and sinful generation.' And we know full well that there is not a natural fear lurking in the heart of man, but the world knows how to reach it; not a passion, but it has an enchantment ready for it; no weakness, no vanity, but it knows how to lay hold of it: so that all our natural hopes and fears, our passions, our infirmities, are liable to be drawn into the conspiracy against Christ and his word. Now you see the source of these temptations, it is easy to conceive how many, and in their kinds how various they are. But there is one distinction to be made with respect to these temptations well worth our observing: some there are which pursue us, and some there are which we pursue: to the one sort we unwillingly resign our faith and our religion, driven thereunto by fears and terrors, or by pains and torments which we are not able to endure. This is the case of such as fall in times of persecution; and we, who are men of like passions, cannot but commiserate their condition, and plead in their behalf the common excuse which belongs to the whole race of weakness and infirmity. But the other kind of temptations come on our invitation: we make our faith a sacrifice to the great idol, the world, when we part with it for honor, wealth, or pleasure. In this circumstance men take pains to show how little they value their religion, and seek occasions to display their libertinism and infidelity, in order to make their way to the favor of a corrupt and degenerate age. This behavior admits of no excuse. These are they, who, properly speaking, love the world more than God and his Christ; and let us not envy them the love of the world, for they will find it a dear purchase at the last.

But whenever infidelity grows into credit and repute, and the world has so vitiated a taste as to esteem the symptoms of irreligion as signs of a good understanding and sound judgment; when there is so little sense of serious things left, that a

man cannot appear to be in earnest concerned for his religion without being thought a fool, or suspected to be a knave; then there arises another temptation to make men ashamed of Christ and of his word. No man likes to be despised by those about him; and he who wants perhaps neither riches nor honor, wants however to live in credit, and in good esteem with his acquaintance, and to preserve at least the character of a man of sense and understanding. How this general and almost natural inclination must work, whenever the age is so far debauched as to esteem irreligion a sure sign of a good understanding, is easily conceived. Those who have a large share of vanity will be drawn in to approve and encourage, to admire and imitate the much celebrated freedom of thinking; for so it is called, though, properly speaking, it might more truly be styled a freedom of talking. Others will be tempted to sit still, and give way to the humor of the world; and will carefully hide their faith in their hearts for fear any signs of it should appear to the utter discredit of their understanding. This is, this always will be, the case in such circumstances. But what must be done? may some say, must we seclude ourselves from conversation, or must we set up to reprove and rebuke every idle word we hear? If we do, our company will soon leave us, though we leave not them. Wonderful difficulties these! So hard it seems, it is to refrain from the company of those who make a mock of sin! A hardship which a good man would choose, and which every bad one must choose if ever he intends to forsake the error of his ways. There is a contagion in ill company, and he who dwells with the scorner shall not be guiltless. But since these difficulties appear so great, compare them with the real hardships that surrounded the Christians of the first ages; they lived in perils; on all sides were terrors; within were fears, without was death. In these circumstances they were called to confess Christ in the face of an enraged and cruel world; and the rule given them to go by was, not to fear those who could kill the body only, but to fear him who could destroy both body and soul everlastingly. If this was their rule under such real difficulties, what must be yours under such pretended ones? If they were not permitted to fear the rage of kings and princes, shall you be

excused for fearing the scorn or the resentment of a light companion? If they were called to brave the sword, and to look every image of death boldly in the face; shall you find pity because you were afraid perhaps of being laughed at and despised by those who are void of understanding?

But not to insist on this, which may perhaps be too high a degree of virtue for the times we live in, let us come lower: if you care not to be a reprover or rebuker of this iniquity, yet surely there is no necessity for you to be an admirer or encourager of it: it is no great sacrifice you make to Christ when you resign your share of the applause, which belongs to those who persecute and blaspheme him. In a word, consider with yourselves that religion is, of all others, the most serious concern. If its pretensions are founded in truth, it is life to embrace them, it is death to despise them. We cannot in this case stand neuter: we cannot serve two masters; we must hold to the one and despise the other. If we confess Christ before men, he will also confess us before God and his holy angels: if we deny him before men, he will deny us at the last day when he shall come in the glory of his Father to judge the world.

Had our Lord been merely a teacher of good things, without any special commission or authority from the great Creator and Governor of the world, it would have been highly absurd to assume to himself this great prerogative of being owned and acknowleged before men. Several have from the light of reason taught many good lessons to the world: but are we bound to take every reasonable man who recommends the practice of virtue, for our master? to own his authority at the peril of our lives? No man ever thought so. Socrates taught many great things to the Greeks before Christ came into the world. If he followed reason he did well; and we shall do well to follow it too, and farther we have no concern with him. But if there be any truth at all in the gospel, the case is far otherwise with respect to our blessed Redeemer; we must own his authority, we must confess him before the world, be the danger of so doing ever so great or extreme. Whence arises this obligation? It cannot rest merely on this, that he was a teacher of reason and good morality; for in that case it would

be sufficient to submit to the reason and the rules of morality which he taught, without concerning ourselves with his authority, which was no more than what reason and virtue give every man. But the case with us is otherwise: our Lord requires of us, that we should confess him before men; and has declared, that if we deny him before the world, he will deny us in the presence of God and his holy angels, when he comes to judge the quick and the dead. Consider what manner of person is this, who requires so much at our hands. If he is indeed the Son of God; if all power in heaven and earth is given him by the Father; if he is constituted by God judge of all men, there is a clear reason to justify his demand, and our obedience: but if he was only a mere teacher of morality and religion, how is he to be justified in pretending to be the only Son of God, in pretending to have all power given him in heaven and earth, and to be appointed judge of all men? You must either own him under these characters, or you must condemn him as an impostor for claiming them. How far those who are willing to admit Christ to be a good teacher, but refuse to acknowlege him in any other character, are chargeable with seeing this consequence, I know not; nor can I see, if they consider it, how they can avoid it.

When therefore we read that our Lord requires of us to confess him before men, the true way to know what we are to confess, is to reflect what he confessed himself; for it cannot be supposed that he thought it reasonable for himself to make one confession, and for his disciples and servants to make another. Look then into the gospel, and see his own confession: he confessed himself to be the only Son of God; to come from the bosom of the Father to die for the sins of the world; to have all power given to him in heaven and earth; to be the judge of the world. When you have weighed these things, read his words, and judge what your duty is: 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XLIX.

II CORINTHIANS, CHAP. V.—VERSES 10, 11.

It is the privilege of a rational being to look forward into futurity, to consider the tendency of his actions, and to view them in their most distant consequences.

By the exercise of this power of reason, the wisest among the heathens discovered that there was ground for men to have expectations beyond this life. The argument for these expectations fully stated. Under such circumstances our blessed Lord appeared, to bring to light life and immortality through the gospel. This fundamental article of religion, as it now stands on revelation, considered.

As to the principal point, there is no difference between the hopes conveyed to us by the gospel and by natural reason: thus far then the doctrine of each must stand or fall one with the other. But the gospel has made an addition to this doctrine, and communicated to us the knowlege of some circumstances which were not discoverable but by revelation. They are principally these; a resurrection of the body; Christ the Judge of the world; rewards and punishments, in proportion to our conduct here.

First; the resurrection of the body was revealed, to give to all men a plain and sensible notion of their being subject to a future judgment. Death is the destruction of the man; for man is made of soul and body: therefore to bring the man into judgment for his deeds, the soul and body must be again brought together. This doctrine does not remove all prejudices, when examined by the scanty notions we have of the powers of na-

ture; but it removes all difficulties that affect this belief, considered with respect to religion and morality; for the single point in which religion is concerned, is to know whether men shall be accountable hereafter for their actions here. Reason tells us they ought to be so: but a difficulty arises from the dissolution of the man by death; and this is followed by endless speculations on the nature of the soul, &c.: but take in the declaration of the gospel, that soul and body shall hereafter be as certainly re-united as they were dissolved by death, and all difficulty concerning a future judgment vanishes.

But still prejudices remain: to some it is incredible that the dead should be raised. To these it may be said, on the ground of the gospel evidence, that the dead have been raised; on the ground of reason, that it is quite as credible that God should be able to raise the dead to life, as he was to give them life at first. But we are farther asked, what body shall be raised, since no man has exactly the same two days together: this apparently plausible objection has nothing to do in the present case; for religion is concerned only to preserve the identity of the person as the object of future judgment, otherwise the difficulty would be as great in the judgments of this life as in those of another.

But the prejudices which affect men most, arise from the weakest of all imaginations, that they can judge from the settled laws and course of nature, what is or is not possible to the power of God. It is true that our powers are bounded by those laws, but it does not follow that his are so bounded who appointed the laws. When the Sadducees denied the resurrection, our Saviour told them, *Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.* But whatever difficulties of this kind may remain, this article has removed all which lie in the way of our considering ourselves as accountable creatures, subject to the future judgment of God: so that revelation has

in this particular brought faith and reason to a perfect agreement.

Secondly; the gospel has made known to us that Christ shall be judge of the world.

Our Saviour tells us that *the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son:* John v. 22.; and again, John v. 27. St. Peter also declares that the Apostles were commissioned to publish this doctrine to all the world: Acts x. 42. Accordingly St. Paul, in his discourse with the men of Athens, fully instructs them in this important point Acts xvii. 31.

It is material to observe that this authority is given to Christ, *because he is the Son of Man*, as he has himself assured us; and that the person ordained to be judge is a man, *even the man whom God raised from the dead*, as St. Paul asserts. And how happy is it for us to have such an one, of whom we may say, as the Apostle to the Hebrews says of our High Priest; *we have not a judge which cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but was in all things tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

It may be said perhaps, that this is drawing consequences on the ground of vulgar apprehensions; and that in reality there is no difference, whether God be judge himself, or commit judgment to the Son of Man: the objectors in this case answered; whilst it is shown that, on the ground of Scripture, we may certainly know what the justice, mercy, and goodness are, by which we must finally stand or fall.

Thus this great fundamental article of religion, involved as it was in the darkness of former ages, is made plain by the light of the gospel. That men were accountable was always known; that there would be a future judgment was generally believed: but how men were to appear to be judged, how rewarded or punished, was not known. That the right of judging men was

in God was well known: but how he would exercise it, whether by himself or another, visibly or invisibly, was not known; infinite were the speculations raised on this subject, instead of which the gospel has assured us, that at the final judgment we shall be, what we now are, real men: and that the man Christ Jesus, who appeared in the world to redeem us, shall judge us by that gospel, and those rules which he left to direct us.

Thirdly; the consequences of this judgment, which all must undergo, considered.

If we consult either Scripture or reason, we shall find no evidence of any farther change to be made in our future state, after once judgment has passed on us. That we are accountable, and therefore shall be judged, reason says; but we can see nothing after judgment, except the reward or punishment consequent on it, and therefore the only conclusion we can draw is, that the condition of man will be finally determined as to happiness or misery, in which he must continue to abide.

As reason can show us nothing beyond judgment, but that state and condition which are the effect of it, so the holy Scripture has given us reason to think that nothing else there shall be, by describing the rewards and punishments of another life, as having perpetual duration. Life eternal is prepared for the righteous, and everlasting punishment for the wicked. Even the mildest interpretation that is given to the threats and denunciations of Scripture, supposes the punishment to last as long as the sinner: so that in this, the lowest view, our all depends on the judgment which shall finally be passed on us at the second coming of our Lord. The Apostle therefore is both just and charitable, when he adds, *knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.* If the Christian religion has cleared our doubts, by *bringing life and immortality to light,* it has also given us reason to be watchful and careful over ourselves; for it is a fearful thing to have to answer for ourselves before the searcher of all hearts; to answer to him that loved us, for despising his

love ; to him that died for us, for having crucified him afresh ; and for having accounted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing. This will be the sad case of every wilful sinner ; and the view of this misery moved the Apostle, and should ever move those who succeed him in his office, to warn men *to flee from the wrath that is to come.*

DISCOURSE XLIX.

II CORINTHIANS, CHAP. V.—VERSES 10, 11.

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.
Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

It is the privilege and distinguishing character of a rational being to be able to look forward into futurity, and to consider his actions, not only with respect to the present advantage or disadvantage arising from them, but to view them in their consequences through all the parts of time in which himself may possibly exist. If therefore we value the privilege of being reasonable creatures, the only way to preserve it is to make use of it; and by extending our views into all the scenes of futurity, in which we ourselves must bear a part, to lay the foundation of solid and durable happiness.

By the exercise of this power of reason, the wisest among the heathens discovered that there was ground for men to have expectations beyond this life. They saw plainly that themselves, and all things that fell under their observation, were dependent beings on the will and power of him who formed them; and when they sought to find him, they were led by a necessary chain of reasoning to the acknowlegement of a supreme, independent, intelligent being. They saw in every part of the creation evident marks of his power, wisdom, and goodness: they discerned that all the inanimate parts of the world acted perpetually in submission to the law of their creation; the sun and all the host of heaven were constant to their courses; and in every other part, the powers of nature were duly and regularly exerted for the preservation of the

present system: among men only they found disorder and confusion. That they had reason was plain; that they were intended to live according to reason could not be doubted; and yet they saw virtue often distressed and abandoned to all the evils of life, vice triumphant, and the world every where subject to the violence of pride and ambition. How to account for this they knew not: this only they could observe, that man was endowed with a freedom in acting, which the other beings of the lower world wanted; and to this they rightly ascribed the disorders to be found in this part of the creation. But though this accounted for the growth of evil, yet it rendered no account of the justice or goodness of God in permitting vice oftentimes to reign here in glory, whilst virtue suffered in distress. On these considerations they concluded that there must be another state after this, in which all the present inequalities in the administration of providence should be set right, and every man receive according to his works.

This was, this is the ground of our natural expectation of a life after this. But on this ground of truth many fables and stories were raised, by fear and superstition, and by the power of imagination: so that the general belief, though right in its foundation, yet in almost all the particulars of it was rendered ridiculous and absurd. Hence it is, that among the writers of antiquity we sometimes find wise men ridiculing the follies and superstitions of the people, and bad men always arguing from these follies against the very notion itself, and calling in question the reality of any future state.

Under these circumstances of the world, our blessed Lord appeared to bring to light life and immortality through the gospel. Let us then consider how this fundamental article of religion now stands on the foot of the gospel revelation.

As to the principal point, there is no difference between the hopes conveyed to us in the gospel, and the expectation built on natural reason: for, as the wisest men thought there must be, so the gospel assures us there will be, 'a day in which God will judge the world in righteousness, and render to every man according to his works.' Thus far then the doctrine of the gospel and the dictates of natural reason must stand or fall together. If this doctrine has had a larger and more extensive

influence through the authority of the gospel, than it could have had by the mere force of speculative reasoning, the world has received an advantage by the encouragement given to virtue, and the restraint laid on vice by these means, which ought ever to be acknowleged with thankfulness.

But the gospel has added to this doctrine, and communicated to us the knowlege of some circumstances, which were not discoverable but by the means of revelation; and they are principally these; that there shall be a resurrection of the body; that Christ shall be judge of the world; that the rewards and punishments in another life shall be in proportion to our behaviour in this.

I shall speak briefly to these particulars, and show for what purpose they were revealed.

First, the resurrection of the body was revealed to give all men a plain and a sensible notion of their being subject to a future judgment. Death is the destruction of the man; and sure we are that the lifeless body is no man; and whatever notions some may have of the soul in its state of separate existence, yet a mere spirit is not a man; for man is made of soul and body; and therefore to bring the man into judgment to answer for his deeds, the soul and the body must be brought together again. This doctrine, established on the authority of the gospel, does not remove all prejudices of the case, when examined by the short and scanty notions we have of the powers of nature; but it effectually removes all difficulties that affect this belief, considered with respect to religion and morality: for the single point in which religion is concerned is to know whether men shall be accountable hereafter for their actions here. Reason tells us they ought to be so: but a great difficulty arises from the dissolution of the man by death; a difficulty followed by endless speculations on the nature of the soul, of its separate existence, of its guilt in this separate state with respect to crimes committed in another, and in conjunction with the body, and by other difficulties of the like kind. But take in the declaration of the gospel, that soul and body shall be as certainly united at the resurrection as they were divided by death, and every man be himself again; and there is no more difficulty in conceiving that men may be

judged for their iniquities hereafter, than there is in conceiving that they may be judged here when they offend against the laws of the country.

But still there are prejudices remaining. To some it is incredible that the dead should be raised. To these we answer, on the foot of the gospel evidence, that the dead have been raised: on the foot of reason, that it is altogether as credible, that God should be able to raise the dead to life a second time, as that he was able to give them life at first. There is no difference in the cases; they are acts of one and the very same power.

But we are farther asked, what body shall be raised, since no man has exactly the same body two days together? New parts are perpetually added by nutrition, old ones carried off by perspiration: so that in the compass of a few years a human body may be almost totally altered, and be no more the same than a ship which has been so often repaired, that no part of the original materials is left. But this objection, as plausible as it may seem, has nothing to do in the present case; for religion is concerned only to preserve the identity or sameness of the person, as the object of future judgment; and has nothing to do with that kind of identity against which the objection can be supposed to have any force. Were the case otherwise, the difficulty would be really as great in human judgments in this life, as in the divine judgment hereafter. Suppose a man should commit murder when he was twenty, and not be discovered till he was sixty, and then brought to trial, would common sense admit him to plead that he was not the same person who committed the fact; and to allege, in proof of it, the alterations in his body for the last forty years? Suppose then that, instead of being discovered at sixty, he should die at sixty, and should rise either with the body he had at sixty, or twenty, or in any intermediate time, would not the case be just the same with respect to the future judgment? Evidently it would be the same: which shows that the article of the resurrection, as far as it is a support of religion and of a future judgment, stands quite clear of this difficulty.

But the prejudices which affect men most, when they consider this article of the resurrection, arise from the weakest of all imaginations; that they can judge from the settled laws and

course of nature, what is or is not possible to the power of God. It is very true that all our powers are bounded by the laws of nature: but does it follow that his power must be so bounded who appointed these laws of nature, and could have appointed others, if he had thought proper? We cannot raise a dead body; our hands are tied up by the laws of nature, which we cannot surpass. Neither can we make or create a new man; but we certainly know, from reason and experience, that there is one who can: and what can induce us to suppose that he cannot give life to a body a second time, who we certainly know gave life to it at first? These prejudices therefore we may safely refer to the power of the Almighty, to which all nature is obedient, and on which we may securely depend for the performance of divine promises, how unpromising soever the circumstances may seem to be which attend them. When the Sadducees denied the resurrection, our Saviour told them, 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God:' intimating plainly, that for the security and certainty of our resurrection we must trust to Scripture, and the declaration of God's purpose contained therein; and for the method and means of bringing this great work to pass, we must rely on the power of God.

But whatever difficulties of this kind may remain, yet this article has removed all which lie in the way of our considering ourselves as accountable creatures, and subject to the future judgment of God. Whatever you may imagine to be the state of separate souls; whatever difficulties may arise in considering a mere spirit as accountable for the actions of this compound being man, they are all out of the question. It is not a mere spirit, but the man himself, who is to be brought to judgment; and plain sense must see and acknowlege the reasonableness of judging a man hereafter for the crimes committed in this life; as evidently as it sees the reasonableness of judging him here, when his crimes happen to be detected. So that the revelation in this particular has brought faith and common sense to a perfect agreement.

Secondly, the gospel revelation has made known to us, that Christ shall be judge of the world.

Our Saviour tells us that 'the Father judgeth no man, but

hath committed all judgment to the Son:' John v. 22. And again: 'The Father hath given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man:' ver. 27. And St. Peter declares that the Apostles had it expressly in their commission to publish this doctrine to all the world: 'He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead:' Acts x. 42. Accordingly St. Paul, in his short discourse to the men of Athens, fully instructed them in this material point: 'God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by the man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead:' Acts xvii. 31.

I will not multiply texts to this purpose, though many more there are which speak the same sense, because this doctrine is very well known to Christians, and is part of the creed which we daily rehearse.

But it is material to observe that this authority is given to Christ, 'because he is the Son of man,' as he himself has assured us; and that the person ordained to be judge is a man, even 'the man whom God raised from the dead,' as St. Paul asserts. How happy is it for us to have a judge, I had almost said so partial, but I may well say so favorable to us, that he was content to be himself the sacrifice to redeem us from the punishment due to our sins! When we consider ourselves, how wretched and weak we are, how perpetually doing wrong either wilfully or ignorantly, and contemplate the infinite majesty, holiness, and justice of God, what account can we hope to give of ourselves to him, whose eyes are purer than to behold iniquity? But see! God hath withdrawn his terrors, and has given a man to be the judge of men. So that we may say of our judge, what the Apostle to the Hebrews says of our High Priest; 'We have not a judge, which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all things tempted like as we are, yet without sin.'

You may think perhaps that this is drawing consequences on the foot of vulgar apprehensions, and that in reality there is no difference whether God be judge himself, or commits the judgment to the Son of man: for since Christ shall come not

only in the power, but in the wisdom and the justice of God also to judge the world, what difference can there be in the judgment, since in both cases it must be guided and formed by the wisdom and justice of God? True it is, that a mere man is not qualified to be judge of the world: the knowlege of hearts is necessary to the right discharge of that office; a knowlege which no mere man was ever endowed with. But still, if the man is to be judge, the sentiments, notions, and feeling of the man, however guided and influenced by superior wisdom, must preside over and govern the whole action; otherwise the man will not be judge. And hence we may answer some difficulties which speculative men have brought into the subject of a future judgment. Some have imagined that justice, mercy, and goodness in God are not of the same kind with justice, mercy, and goodness in men; and therefore that we can never, from our notions of these qualities in man, argue consequentially to the attributes of God, or to the acts flowing from these attributes. The result of which is, that when we talk of God's justice or mercy in judging the world, we talk of something which we do not understand. But if men would consult Scripture, these difficulties would not meet them in their way: for surely we know what justice, mercy, and goodness mean among men; and since the Scripture assures us that the man whom God raised from the dead is ordained judge of the world, we may be very certain that the justice, mercy, and goodness to be displayed in the future judgment will be such as all men have a common sense and apprehension of: unless you can imagine that a new rule is to be introduced, to which the judge, and those to be judged, are equally strangers. On this foot of Scripture then we may certainly know what the justice, mercy, and goodness are, by which we must finally stand or fall; and this point being secured, the speculation may be left to shift for itself.

And thus you see how this great and fundamental article of religion, involved in darkness in former ages, is made plain and sensible to mankind by the light of the gospel. That men were accountable, they always knew; that there would be a future judgment, was generally believed: but how men were to appear in judgment, or how mere unbodied spirits were to be

judged, how rewarded, or how punished, they knew not. That the right of judging men was in God was well known; but how he would exercise it, whether by himself or another, visibly or invisibly, they knew not. Infinite were the disputes on this subject: instead of which the gospel has given a plain sensible representation, assuring us that at the judgment we shall be what we now are, men, real men; and that the man Christ Jesus, who appeared in the world to redeem us, will appear again to judge us by that very gospel, and those very rules, which he has left us to govern and conduct ourselves by.

Thirdly, let us then go one step farther, and view the consequences of this judgment; this solemn judgment, which every mortal must undergo. If we consult either Scripture or reason, we shall find no evidence of any farther change to be made in our future state, after once judgment has passed on us. That we are accountable, and shall therefore be judged, reason says; but can see nothing relating to us after judgment, except the reward or the punishment consequent on it: and therefore the only conclusion to be drawn from this information is, that the condition of man will be finally determined as to happiness or misery, and consequently that man must continue under the good or the bad effects of the last judgment.

As reason can show us nothing beyond judgment, but that state and condition which are the effect of it; so the holy Scripture has given us reason to think that nothing else there shall be, by describing the rewards and punishments of another life, as having perpetual duration. Life eternal is prepared for the righteous, and everlasting punishment for the wicked. The fire prepared to receive them is never to go out, the worm prepared to torment them will never die. These images carry great terror with them, and have led some to a milder interpretation of the threats of Scripture than the language of it seems to import. But even the mildest interpretation, that allows any meaning at all to those threats, supposes the punishment to last as long as the sinner lasts. So that in this, the lowest view, our all depends on the judgment which shall be finally passed on us at the second coming of our Lord. There is then a justness of thought, as well as great charity to the souls of men, in what the Apostle adds, 'Knowing the terror

of the Lord, we persuade men.' If the Christian revelation has cleared our doubts, by 'bringing life and immortality to light through the gospel;' if it has given us ground for hope and confidence by assuring us that we shall be judged by him, 'who so loved us, that he gave himself for us,' and submitted to die, that we might live; it has also given us ground to be watchful and careful over ourselves, and to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. For it is a fearful thing to be to answer for ourselves before the searcher of all hearts; to answer to him who loved us, for despising the love he showed us; to answer to him who died for us, for having crucified him afresh, and put him to open shame; and for having accounted the blood of the covenant an holy thing. This will be the sad case of every wilful sinner. The view of this misery and distress, which sinners are calling on themselves by their iniquity, moved the Apostle, and must ever move those who succeed to his office, to warn men 'to flee from the wrath that is to come.' We know 'the terror of the Lord,' and therefore 'persuade men.' Happy would it be, if men, knowing and considering these terrors, would suffer themselves to be persuaded. Which God grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord: 'to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honor and glory, henceforth, and for evermore.' Amen.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE L.

PHILIPPIANS, CHAP. II.—VERSES 6—11.

PART I.

THE words of the text have been strongly debated by Christians differing in opinion about the person and dignity of our Saviour; and as they are often handled, lead more certainly to the knowlege of the interpreter's opinion than the Apostle's. It is not intended to press them into the service of any particular opinion, but fairly to expound them; to infer nothing from them, but what may be shown to be in them, even by the necessity of the Apostle's argument. To avoid confusion, this argument shall be represented, I. intire and by itself: II. the things implied in it shall be considered, which we may call the principles on which the Apostle reasons: III. by a comparison of one part with another, the true sense and meaning of each shall be laid open. And, I. St. Paul exhorts the Philippians to love one another, and mutually to aid and assist each other in all things (ii. 1. 2.): then, like a wise physician, he searches out the bottom of the evil which he would cure; and knowing this to be pride and vain-glory, he proceeds to admonish them (3. 4.) in the next two verses; *Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other*, &c. To support this doctrine, and enforce their obedience to it, he represents in lively colors the great humility of Christ as an example (verses 5-8). To encourage their obedience, he sets before them, from the same example, what glorious rewards they might promise them-

selves hereafter for their present humility (9-11). This is the whole of the Apostle's argument. II. We may observe, in considering the several things implied in it, first, that the Apostle here points out to us three different states and conditions of Christ; the first, his state of dignity, from which he willingly descended, as expressed in the words *Who being in the form of God;* the second, his state of humility, to which he descended, as *he made himself of no reputation;* the third his state of glory, and exaltation as thus intimated; *wherefore God also hath highly exalted him.* These are all essential to the Apostle's argument; nor can one be taken away without destroying its force. For example: remove the first state, and the second is no longer one of humiliation, nor Christ an example of humility: this point explained. In the second place, it is implied in the argument, that he was in possession of whatever belonged to his state of dignity and excellence before he underwent any thing that belonged to his state of humiliation: this point fully made out, showing that he was *in the form of God,* before he was made *in the likeness of man.* III. It is necessarily implied in the argument, that he underwent whatever belonged to his state of humiliation before he enjoyed any thing that belonged to his state of exaltation: this point established: hence it follows that his natural state of dignity and his acquired state of exaltation are perfectly distinct and different; since one was antecedent to, the other consequent on his humiliation: whence his dignity before his humiliation belongs not to him in virtue of what he did or suffered; nor is it any part of the exaltation he received after, or on account of his sufferings. This particularly insisted on, as it is a common mistake to think that because Christ was *for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor,* these dignities belong to him only because he suffered. Hence to all arguments drawn from the attributes of power and knowlege, &c., to prove the eternity and divinity of the Logos, some

think it a sufficient reason to say, that Christ received his glory at his resurrection, and was made perfect through sufferings; and therefore that these are not his natural perfections, but his acquired honors, received from the Father at the redemption. Thus they answer not the arguments, but confound Christ's states of glory: the one the glory of the eternal Logos, the other of the Son of man. St. Paul expressly founds the former of these on his creating the worlds (Coloss. i. 15-17.): the latter on his resurrection, in the next verse. These then are different states, and founded in different characters. St. John also makes the same distinction: chap. v. 25. 27. These verses enlarged on; whence it is clearly shown that two distinct states are meant, when he says that the dead shall be raised by the voice *of the Son of God;* but they shall be judged by the voice of *the Son of man.* Thus also the Apostle to the Hebrews (i. 2. 3.) describes the dignity and excellence of the person whom God sent to our redemption, showing the glory of Christ before all worlds. Then in the following verses, he speaks of his state of exaltation, in consequence of his sufferings, clearly distinguishing between the dignity of his nature and the honor of his office. The Apostle, in ii. 9. says that Jesus was *made a little lower* than the angels; but here that he *was made better* than the angels: these terms fully explained. But this difficulty vanishes if we rightly distinguish his three states of dignity, of humiliation, and of exaltation, evidently mentioned in the text. According to this key we may expound the Apostle to the Hebrews by the Apostle to the Philippians: this exposition made out. We find Christ described by St. John as with God, and as God, and as the Creator of all things (i. 1-3.): in the eighth chapter our Saviour bears testimony of himself, *before Abraham was, I am.* Had he said before Abraham was, I was, it might have been inferred that he existed before *Abraham,* and yet was born into the world long after Abraham, and therefore had existed long before his coming

into the world. But in the passage as it is, something more is implied which peculiarly belongs to the expression *I am:* what that is, we may learn from the original words as used by God, in answer to Moses inquiring after God's name (Exod. iii. 14). Why should our Saviour apply this expression to himself, knowing to whom alone it had been applied, and knowing that it would have been in the highest degree, in the man so applying it, committing *the robbery* of making himself *equal with God?* Besides, the words are a mere solecism, and according to the analogy of language express nothing; for to carry present time back, and make it antecedent to the past, is shuffling ideas together which can have no place in the mind or understanding. If then the expression means any thing, the *I am* must belong to Christ, as signifying eternity and permanency of duration, which, with the ascribing to him the creation of all things, is the greatest power we have any notion of. Let us now look to the other part of the question. At our Saviour's last appearance to his disciples, to give them full commission to teach and baptise, with full assurance of his being with them to the end of the world, he introduces his charge thus: *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth:* where he clearly speaks of power conferred on him after his resurrection, in virtue of which he thus commissions them, *Go ye therefore*, and teach all nations. The import of the word *therefore* fully explained from the power he had received. It is now considered what weight there is in the great *Socinian* argument against the eternity of the Logos. All power, they say, was conferred on our Saviour after the resurrection: it is therefore absurd to ascribe any to him before, since he that receives all power is supposed to have had none before he received it. This objection, though plausible at first view, when duly considered will be found to miss the aim; as the power spoken of in St. Matthew, and that in St. John, belong to different and distinct states; and therefore his receiving all power as

due at this determinate time, argues not his having none before that time: this shown from the grounds of a royal commission from a human prince. The creation and preservation of all things are ascribed, the former by St. John, and the latter by St. Paul, to the same eternal and inherent power. But in Hebrews and Colossians, with respect to his power of office, he is styled Head of the Church. This point fully developed. We know what is said of a new creation by virtue and holiness; but were powers, principalities and dominions, things visible and invisible, which the Apostle declares to be works of his hands, thus newly created? Was the material world redeemed and made holy? What absurdities may we not believe or teach, if such are the doctrines of clear and unbiassed reason! Conclusion: from the text and other parts of Scripture there are three distinct states of our Lord spoken of, and unless we have an eye to this material observation, we shall not understand the Scripture, or the controverted points concerning the eternity and divinity of the Son of God; but we shall absurdly confuse the glories which he received in reward of his obedience with the antecedent and inherent glories of his nature.

PART II.

The three distinct states belonging to Christ Jesus, and mentioned in the words of the text, being supposed, we now proceed, thirdly, to compare the several parts of St. Paul's argument together, and to examine what the Apostle teaches us concerning each of these states. As to those of humiliation and exaltation, the difficulties are not great. It will be readily allowed that in the first he was very man, subject to the infirmities of human nature, and that he underwent the bitter death of the cross; that in the last, he is Lord and Head over the church under God: that he now governs it, and shall at the last day appear in the majesty of his Father, to judge the world.

Thus far most Christians are agreed, though they may differ concerning his first state, and his proper glories before his coming into the world. The text first describes this glorious state, *Who being in the form of God*, in order to set forth his great humility in becoming man: the following words, as they stand in our translation, describe the excellency of this glory, which was so real and transcendent, *that he thought it no robbery to be*, i. e. he thought himself intitled to be, *equal with God:* but this translation is not insisted on; for it is more agreeable to the Apostle's argument and language to suppose that he intends to express the first degree or instance of his humility, and that the words should thus be rendered, *Who, being in the form of God, was not fond or tenacious of appearing as God, but made himself of no reputation.* The reasons of thus rendering these words not given; but in either way the τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ belong to Jesus Christ: this point enlarged on. Some render these words so as purposely to exclude Christ from the dignity here mentioned, and make the Apostle speak thus: *Who, being in the form of God, did not arrogate, assume, or lay claim to any equality or likeness with God.* This bears no analogy to the words in the original, nor can it agree with the aim and design of the Apostle. The original expression is metaphorical, taken from catching prey. The application of this metaphor explained, and the point enlarged on: whence it appears that St. Paul evidently supposes the τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ to belong to Christ before his humiliation, when he was in the form of God. Secondly, by comparing the several parts of St. Paul's argument together, it will appear that the expressions μορφὴ Θεοῦ, and τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ, relate to the same thing, so that he who possesses the first, has a right to the last. The foundation of the Apostle's argument is, that Christ enjoying a most exalted state of glory, was not fond or tenacious of that glory, but made himself of no reputation; for this argument being wholly spent in setting forth Christ's humility, there is

no need to mention any other glory than that which he, out of his humility, laid aside; whence the glory which he had is the same as the glory which he laid aside. From the two verses together, according to the signification of the original, it appears that the humility of Christ consisted in changing willingly a glorious for an inglorious condition: this point enlarged on. From the words therefore, *who being in the form of God, took upon him the form of a servant,* the Apostle plainly intimates that he obscured or laid aside the glory belonging to the form of God when he took the form of a servant: the *form of God,* therefore, expresses all those glories which Christ suffered to be hid in his state of humiliation. The same thing is expressed by the *equality with God* here mentioned: this point explained; and it is shown that we must necessarily say that the *form of God,* and the *equality with God* are one and the same thing. This perhaps does not discover the precise notion belonging to each of these expressions, but it clearly shows that both did equally belong to our Saviour before his coming into the world; which all allow to be the proper character of Christ here, however they limit it in their various expositions. Moreover, the form of the argument proves that St. Paul esteemed these to be Christ's natural and inherent, not his borrowed glories; for he exhorts the Philippians thus: *Look not every man on his own things; but every man also on the things of others.* This passage explained. He farther exhorts them thus: *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*

He then sets forth how little Christ regarded τὰ ἑαυτοῦ; for being in the form of God, he was not eager of appearing equal with God. This form of God therefore, and this equality with God, were those things of his own which he did not look for. If he meant not this, the precept and the example cannot meet in the same point. Supposing then this to be the meaning of the terms *the form of God,* and *to be equal with God,* we must yet consider who and what manner of person he is to whom

these things belong, so as to be his own: the glories of God, even if communicated to a creature, could in no sense be said to be the creature's own glories: our own glories are those only which are peculiar and proper to our nature. From the seventh and eighth verses of the text, the Apostle clearly means to oppose the *form of a servant* to *the form of God:* when he laid aside the latter, he took the former: if we can determine the meaning of one, it will lead to the knowlege of the other; the true key to which is in the Epistle to the Hebrews, i. 1-4. The substance of this is contained in the words, *who being in the form of God:* but the Apostle to the Hebrews shows wherein the true difference between Christ and all other beings lies, ver. 5. 6. declaring who Christ is; and of the angels he speaks in ver. 7. and 14. From the image which the writer to the Hebrews seems to have had before him, viz. that of a great household, where he considers God as the great *Pater-familias,* Christ the *Filius-familias,* and other beings as servants of different orders, we can understand the Apostle to the Philippians when he says, Christ took on him the form of a servant: this point enlarged on. The Apostle to the Philippians adds, *being made in the likeness of men:* the reason of this addition we see in Heb. ii. 16. Angels are servants as well as men: therefore when Christ took on himself *the form of a servant,* he might be supposed to have taken the nature of the angels. To put aside doubt, the Apostle says, he took the form of a servant, *in the likeness of men;* i. e. in the nature of men; hence the μορφὴ δούλου is the common mark and character of all God's creatures; the ὁμοίωμα is the peculiar character of each species: hence these together make a real and perfect man. We must attend to the Apostle's argument in order to distinguish rightly between *the form, the likeness,* and *the fashion,* as applied all to Christ Jesus. The equality with God, which Christ did not retain, but emptied himself of, clearly means the divine glories in which he appeared, and which during his state of humiliation

he laid aside: his nature he could not lay aside: he was still the Son of God; and therefore, says the Apostle, being man, he was found in fashion as a man: which expression answers to *the being equal with God.* The form of God, in the first part, answers both to the form of a servant, and to the likeness of men, in the second part; the form of a servant being common to all God's creatures, it did not of itself sufficiently denote Christ's nature: hence the addition, *in the likeness of men,* was necessary: *the form of God* required not this: the argument for our Saviour's divinity from this text briefly recapitulated. This exposition of the text is farther confirmed by St. Paul to the Ephesians, iv. 22-24., again in 1 Cor. xv. 47. 48., and many other places of like import. In our text, the Apostle does not expressly compare the first with the second *Adam;* but the contrast which he draws between the conduct and spirit of the second Adam, and the corrupt affections of the first, leaves no doubt of his meaning. Moses relates that *Adam* was created after *God's image,* and was made lord over this lower world. St. Paul tells us that Christ was in *the form of God,* which gave him dominion over the works of nature. Moses declares how Adam, through disobedience and a vain ambition, fell from the dignity in which he was created, and intailed misery on his descendants: St. Paul says, that Christ through obedience hath set us an example, by which, if the same mind be in us, we may recover what is lost: this contrast carried on and completed. If then we admit of this reference to the case of the first Adam, it will determine the sense of those words in our translation, *he thought it no robbery to be equal with God;* for in that case the opposition between the two characters would require that it should be said of Adam, that he thought it a robbery to be equal with God: which is absolutely inconsistent with the account of *Moses,* and with the view and reasoning of St. Paul.

PART III.

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross: this point enlarged on, and the humility of Christ shown in taking on himself the form of a servant, and becoming obedient to the death of the vilest of slaves. This humility is plainly represented to us under two views: in one Christ, who was *in the form of God*, descends so low as to become man; in the other, he descends yet lower, taking on himself the meanest condition, and undergoing the most ignominious death. The first instance of Christ's humility has been explained by considering from what, and to what, he descended; the second instance is now subjected to a similar examination. In the first we learned the Apostle's opinion concerning our Saviour before his incarnation; in this we shall find what notion he had of him during his abode on earth. The question then is, what manner of person did St. Paul conceive Christ to be, when he said of him, *being found in fashion* as a man? This will appear by considering what is meant by *the fashion of a man*, and why St. Paul thus expressed himself; and likewise by examining the instances of humility given in the text, and considering of whom it can properly be said, that he was humble in submitting to death. *The fashion of a man* denotes those proper and distinguishing characters, which belong to a man as such, and not to any other kind of being: this shown from a consideration of St. Paul's use of the original word, and of the verb derived from it: thus, when he tells us of Satan's *transforming* himself into an angel of light, and of his ministers *transforming* themselves into Apostles of Christ, in both places he uses the verb derived from the original word in this place; and in both places he means, not that these persons actually became such, but that they appeared in such fashions, and could not be distinguished from their originals. Hence the *fashion of a man*

only means the true and real appearance of a man. To ascertain what led St. Paul to this expression, and why he might not as well have said, and *being man* he humbled himself, we must look back to the first rise of the Apostle's argument. The person here spoken of, Jesus Christ, was in the form of God, yet emptied himself not of his being or nature, but of the glory and majesty belonging to him: this point enlarged on, showing that though he continued to be the same, yet, as to his outward dignity and appearance, he was mere man: otherwise, in what tolerable sense could the Apostle say of him, *being found in fashion as a man?* for in what other fashion should *a man* be found? The reason of this limitation fully explained in his being something more than man. The Apostle perhaps had another view in the expression, *and being found in fashion as a man*, with respect to what follows, *he became obedient unto death.* It might well seem strange that any should attempt the life of him, who was himself the Lord of life: who would be bold or vain enough to think of compassing his death? To which the Apostle gives this previous answer; *he was found in fashion as a man*, and as such underwent the consequences: this the proper import of the word *found:* by whom? by those who sought his life, and called him to the obedience which he readily paid. Allowing the Apostle to have had this view, we must suppose that he thought him more than mortal man, as he is at some pains to assign a reason which could tempt any one to suppose him liable to death. This topic enlarged on. II. From the instances of humility given in the text, it is considered to what sort of person they can be applied as such; *he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* All must die, and if to die be humility, all are in this respect equally humble. Why then this distinction of Christ's humility? why is it humility in him, which in the case of others is necessity? This point enlarged on, showing that he was mortal, else he could not have died; that he was more than mortal,

else he could not have avoided death; in which case, to die had been no humility. St. Paul therefore supposes him to be more than mere man, who willingly laid down his life, which no man could take from him. We may also observe the Apostle's accuracy, who says, that when Christ quitted the glories proper to the form of God, he *emptied himself;* for the form of a servant and the likeness of men were inconsistent with divine glories: had he retained them, he could not have come in such form or likeness: he therefore emptied himself of them. In the second instance, he considers Christ as found in the fashion of a man and humbly submitting to death: now to die, even on the cross, has nothing in it incompatible with the fashion of a man; therefore, says the Apostle, *he humbled himself.* This humility therefore bears no relation to the *fashion of a man* here spoken of, which continued one and the same on the cross as before: it relates to his person and real dignity, as distinguished from the appearance in which he was found: this point enlarged on. But farther, *Christ took on him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men:* it indeed was great humility for him who was in the form of God, to become mere man: but having become so, since death is the natural end of all men, what farther humility is there in that he *became obedient unto death?* The reason is, that though he was man, yet as Lord of all things, he could, as he himself has told us, take up his life and lay it down; hence St. Paul, 1 Cor. ii. 8. says, *they killed the Lord of life,* or the Prince of life, as expressed in St. Peter's sermon. For him therefore to die was great humility; to die on the cross was still greater; submitting himself to the malice of those who lived only by the power of him they were destroying. It was humility therefore to become man; and when so, it was humility to die. Consider St. Paul in this view, and his discourse is just, the example full; but otherwise we shall hardly find either his argument, or the humility of Christ Jesus.

PART IV.

From verses 9-11. of the text enlarged on, we are instructed in the true reason, and the true foundation of the honor, worship, and glory, which the Christian church has ever paid, and still continues to pay to our blessed Lord. It is difficult to conceive how any accession of glory or honor should be made to him, who was, before his coming into the world, *in the form of God*, and therefore possessing all things. Yet the Apostle's argument supposes such an accession on his exaltation as a reward for his humility and obedience. Wherefore God has *more* highly exalted him, &c.: now, according to the Apostle's reasoning, this glory ought to be more excellent than the first glory; for if God gave him nothing but what he had a right to, according to the very excellency of his nature, how did he reward his humility? This point enlarged on. But it may be said, how can these things be? how can he, who is *the brightness of his Father's glory, the express image of his person*, be exalted in glory? especially considering that Christ, in praying for glory for himself, prays for no other than that which he had before the world was: John xvii. 5. To set this matter in its true light, we must consider that the glories of nature and the glories of office are different and distinct. The Apostle says nothing of nature or essence: he speaks of the person of Christ, and considers him as the same person, and of the same nature, in all his different states of glory, humility, and exaltation: this point enlarged on. The Apostle then infers, not that the natural powers and dignities of Christ were increased, or capable of being so, but only that in consequence of redemption, God made him head over all, and so intitled him to that worship and those honors which were not paid to him before. He was subservient to his Father in the creation of the world: John i. 3. Yet the worship and honor due from the creature to his Creator, always were, and still are

paid to the Father; for as the evidence arising from the natural world leads to the acknowlegement of only one great Being, there could be no pretence in setting up another either in opposition to, or conjunction with him, to be an object of worship. But when Christ undertook and redeemed the world, then it was thought proper to make known his primary glory, that we might know whence to expect salvation, and that the honor and obedience due both to our Maker and to our Redeemer might be consistent. Thus Christ, having redeemed the world, was by the Father made Lord of all things: and thus the Lord of every man is Christ, whose we all are. There is no room to speculate about nature or essence, or to suppose that Christ, before his exaltation, was less honorable, any more than to suppose that God was less honorable before the creation; because at the creation the sons of God sang together for joy, and paid him new honors and adoration. This difficulty being thus removed, the doctrine of the text is considered in the following method: I. that the power and authority exercised by Christ Jesus, in and over the Church of God, are derived from this exaltation; and therefore, II. that the honor and worship paid to Christ, in and by the Church of God, are founded in this exaltation: III. that the power and authority exercised by Christ, and the honor and worship paid to him, are, and ought to be, ultimately referred to the glory of God the Father. These propositions are so evident from the words of the text, as to be subject to no doubt in the explication: but it may be of service to show that they are also agreeable to, and confirmed by, the whole tenor of Scripture. With regard to the first proposition; the first authority produced is that of our Lord himself, who, just before his ascension, and the commission given to his disciples, to teach and baptise in his name, did, as it were, open his own, which was the foundation of theirs: Matth. xxviii. 18-20. These verses commented on, showing that this power is part of the exaltation

spoken of in the text; and that in consequence of their commission, all acts done by them in his name are founded in the power which he received after his resurrection. St. Paul, in Rom. i. 4. says, that Christ was declared to be the Son of God *with power*, &c. God, at Christ's baptism, and at the transfiguration, declared him to be his *well-beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased;* but at the resurrection, to be his Son *with power*. The Apostle's sense is fully expressed, Rom. xiv. 9: this passage commented on and explained. In the Epistle to the Colossians towards the middle of chap. i. St. Paul speaks largely of Jesus Christ, not only distinguishing between the power by which he created all things, and the power by which he governs all things, as head of the Church; but marking also the different sources and originals whence these powers proceed. One place more is mentioned, Ephes. i. 17-23., where St. Paul describes the power and authority of Christ, and founds all on his resurrection and consequent exaltation. The Scripture abounds with such evidence; nor is any thing plainer in the gospel than that Christ is our Lord, our King, our Mediator, and Intercessor. The second proposition is a natural consequence of what has been already said. The title which Christ Jesus has to receive honor and worship in the Church, is the reason and foundation on which they are paid him: what his title is has been already shown; and consequently the foundation of the Church's worship. But that faith may not rest on man's wisdom, hear the evidence of Scripture on this point also. In the Revelation of St. John several hymns of the Church, in honor of God and his Christ, are recorded, than which we cannot find a better copy for our devotions: see chap. iv. 11. Here the adoration paid to God the Father is founded on his being the Creator of all things. In the next chapter, the worship of Christ is founded on this, that he was slain, and that by his blood he redeemed us: the same praises are also sung to him in the 12th verse: from all

which it is evident that the worship of Christ is founded on the redemption, and relates to the power and authority which he received from God at his resurrection. The confession drawn from the text, *that God has given Christ a name that is above every name,* &c. implies much more than a bare acknowlegement that he is Lord; it comprehends those honors, and that worship, which those who heartily confess him as Lord, will naturally and readily pay to him. How this confession must be made, and whence it must proceed, St. Paul tells us in Rom. x. 8-9: these verses commented on, showing that the confession of our faith in Christ Jesus is that faith by which we shall be saved: this point fully enlarged on. But if Christ be not risen from the dead and exalted to glory, *then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain:* but if he be risen, and be exalted to glory, how absurd is it to deny him the honors due to him! The fear which some have, that by paying their duty to their Redeemer, they rob God of his peculiar honor, and set up an object of worship in opposition to his plain commands, that himself alone is to be worshipped, will vanish, if we consider, lastly, that all powers exercised by Christ, and all honors paid to him, are ultimately referred to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The honor and worship paid to the Son must either be part of the service we owe to God, or inconsistent with it: if we have found out new objects of adoration, we offend against the law, *thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve:* but to honor Christ, in virtue of God's command, to honor the Son even as we honor the Father, is part of the service which we owe to God, and arises out of the command itself. Our Saviour has told us, *that all power is given unto him;* thereby asserting both his own and his Father's authority: this point enlarged on. He has told us by his Apostle that, at the end of all things, the Son shall resign his power, *that God may be all in all;* plainly intimating that the power now exercised by

him is his Father's, which, as it is at last to be given up to him, so was it at first received from him: hence the honor paid to Christ is referred ultimately to God the Father: this point enlarged on with reference to the different offices of Christ. These things clearly show that the gospel has not strained the precepts of natural religion, in teaching us to honor the Son, whom the Father hath made head of all things, even to their consummation.

DISCOURSE L.

PHILIPPIANS, CHAP. II.—VERSES 6—11.

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

PART I.

THE words now read to you have been strongly debated by Christians, differing in opinion about the person and dignity of our blessed Saviour; and as they are often handled, lead more certainly to the knowlege of the interpreter's opinion than of the Apostle's.

I intend not to press them into the service of any particular opinions, but fairly to expound them; and to infer nothing from them, but what may evidently be shown to be in them, even by the necessity of the Apostle's argument. To avoid obscurity and confusion, I shall proceed in the following method:

First, I shall represent to you the Apostle's argument intire and by itself.

Secondly, I shall consider the several things implied in it; which, with respect to this particular argument, we may call the principles on which the Apostle reasons.

Thirdly, by comparing one part with another, I shall endeavor to lay before you the true sense and meaning of each part.

First then, I shall represent to you the Apostle's argument intire and by itself.

At the beginning of this second chapter, St. Paul exhorts the Philippians to be at peace and unity among themselves, to love one another, and to be of the same mind, mutually aiding and assisting each other in all things. Hear his own words: 'If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies; fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.' And then, like a wise physician, he searches to the bottom of the evil which he would cure; and well knowing that pride and vainglory are the perpetual sources of strife and contention, the bane of mutual love and charity, he exhorts them to fly from these evils, presses them to lowliness of mind, and admonishes them not to overvalue themselves, nor undervalue others; but that they should practise humility towards one another, each esteeming other better than themselves. Thus far he advances in the two next verses: 'Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.'

To support this doctrine, and to inforce their obedience to it, he sets before them the example of Christ; and in lively colors represents his great humility: he shows them how much below himself he descended for their sakes; how truly great he was, and how truly low he made himself; by nature, how much higher than the highest; by choice, how much lower than the lowest. 'Let this mind,' says he, 'be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.' And that their obedience might want no due encouragement, he sets before them, from the same ex-

ample, what glorious rewards they might promise themselves hereafter, for their present humility and lowliness of mind: for this abandoned, this crucified Jesus was not left to sink under the obscurity of his voluntary humility; but as a reward of his humility and sufferings, he was raised to the highest pitch of dignity and power: 'Wherefore,' says he, 'God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' This then is the whole of the Apostle's argument.

Let us now, in the second place, consider the several things implied in it; which, with respect to this particular argument, we may call the principles on which the Apostle reasons.

And, first, you may observe that the Apostle here evidently points out to us three different states and conditions of Christ: the first is his state of dignity, from which he willingly descended, expressed in those words, 'Who being in the form of God:' the second is the state of humility, to which he descended, in those words, 'He made himself of no reputation:' the third is his state of glory and exaltation, intimated in those words, 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him.' These three states or conditions of Christ are essential to the Apostle's argument: for take away any one of them, and the example which the Apostle would propose is lost; not only the force of the argument is lessened, but the argument itself intirely destroyed. For instance: if you remove the first state, that of his natural dignity and excellence, the second state will be no longer a state of humiliation, nor Christ any longer an example of humility: for if he was not better than a servant, before he was a servant, his being a servant was his lot and condition, not his choice; it was owing to the order of nature and providence, and not to his humility; and he was no more humble in being born to be a servant, than others are who are born to the same state; and often too without the humility which is proper and necessary to their condition.

Secondly, it is implied in the argument, that he was in possession of whatever belonged to his state of dignity and excel-

lence, before he underwent any thing that belonged to his state of humiliation: for his voluntarily descending from his dignity to a lower and meaner condition, is the very act and real ground and foundation of his humility; and therefore, whatever is meant by his being in the form of God, or whatever is meant by his being made in the likeness of men, thus much at least is evident, that he was in the form of God before he was made in the likeness of men; because his being made in the likeness of men is given as one great instance of his humility; but his being in the form of God was his very dignity and excellence: and therefore, as it is necessarily supposed that his dignity was antecedent to his humility, it is likewise necessary to assert that he was 'in the form of God,' before he was made 'in the likeness of men.'

Thirdly, it is necessarily implied in the argument, that he underwent whatever belonged to his state of humiliation, before he enjoyed any thing that belonged to his state of exaltation; because his exaltation was the effect and reward of his humility; and being purchased and obtained by his humility, it could not be antecedent to it: consequently it necessarily follows that his natural state of dignity, and his acquired state of exaltation, are two perfectly different and distinct states; since one was evidently antecedent to, the other as evidently consequent of, his humiliation: from whence it follows that his being in the form of God, being the dignity which he was possessed of before his humiliation, does not belong to him in virtue of any thing he did or suffered; nor is any part of that glory to which he was exalted, or which he received after or on account of his sufferings.

This ought to be the more particularly insisted on, because it is a common mistake to think, that because Christ was exalted to glory at his resurrection, and 'for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor,' as the Apostle to the Hebrews speaks, that therefore all glory and honor, and all dignity and excellence, which are ever ascribed to him, belong to him only in consequence of his suffering and obedience. From hence it is, that some men think it a sufficient answer to all arguments drawn from the attributes of power and knowlege, and the like, to prove the eternity and the divinity of the Logos, to say, that

Christ received his glory at his resurrection, and was made perfect through sufferings; and therefore the glory and power which are any where ascribed to him, are not his natural perfections, but his acquired honors, and of no ancienter a date than the redemption. But this is not to answer the arguments, but to confound the distinct states of glory which belong to Christ; the glory which he had with the Father before the worlds, and the glory which he received from the Father at the redemption: one the glory of nature; the other the glory of office; one the glory of the eternal Logos: the other the glory of the Son of man.

Thus, for instance, we find the glory which he had with the Father before the worlds to be expressly founded on his creating the worlds: 'Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature; for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist:' Coloss. i. 15. 16. 17. And in the very next verse the Apostle mentions an honor belonging to his state of exaltation, and founds it expressly on his resurrection, as he has done what went before on his power of creation: 'And he is,' says he, 'the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead:' ver. 18. As Lord of all, he is styled 'the first-born of every creature;' as the head of the church, 'first-born, from the dead.' These then are different states, and founded in different characters.

Thus in St. John we may often observe the same difference. To raise the dead is a power equivalent to that of creation; and therefore St. John tells us, 'The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God:' John v. 25. In the very next verse but one, speaking of his being the judge of the world, which belongs to him in virtue of the redemption, and is one of the glories of his exaltation, he says, that 'the Father hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.' Surely it is not for nothing that St. John, in the compass of four or five lines, speaks of him under different characters; and what can the

reason be, but that there are distinct powers and glories belonging to his distinct states? And therefore when the Evangelist mentions the powers of one kind, it was necessary to mention the proper character from whence they flowed; when he mentioned the powers of the other kind, it was necessary to mention the other character to which they belonged; and therefore it is that he says, the dead shall be raised by the voice of the 'Son of God,' but they shall be judged by the voice of the 'Son of man.'

The same likewise may be observed in the first chapter of the Hebrews. In the second and third verses the Apostle describes the dignity and excellence of the person whom God sent to our redemption: 'He hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things; by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power:' thus far he evidently describes the glory which Christ had with the Father before the worlds; for this is the character of the person whom he sent to redeem us. Then it follows: 'When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.' The Apostle, who had before spoken of the state of dignity which he had before the worlds, now speaks of his state of exaltation, which he received after his sufferings: according to the dignity of nature, he was 'the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, and the upholder of all things by the word of his power:' but, according to the honor of his office, after he had 'purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.'

In the ninth verse of the second chapter, the Apostle says, that Jesus was 'made a little lower' than the angels: and yet here he says he 'was made better' than the angels: if he was made lower, in order to redeem us, it seems to imply he was really and by nature higher; and if he was made higher, it seems to imply he was really and by nature lower: but this

difficulty vanishes by rightly distinguishing his three states of dignity, of humiliation, and of exaltation; which you see evidently mentioned in the Philippians, the place now under consideration, and so often supposed and referred to in other parts of holy writ. According to this key, we may expound the Apostle to the Hebrews, by the Apostle to the Philippians: for when he who was in the form of God, made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man, he was then in these several respects 'made lower than the angels;' but when, after his suffering death on the cross, he was exalted by God, and had a name given him above every name, then was he 'made so much better than the angels, as he had by inheritance a more excellent name than they;' a name to which even they were to pay their homage and adoration.

In the beginning of St. John's gospel we find him thus described; 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.' And in the eighth chapter we find our Saviour giving this testimony of himself: 'Before Abraham was, I am.' Suppose he had said, before Abraham was, I was; thus much at least would have been the consequence, that he had an existence before Abraham; and yet he was born into the world long after Abraham: evidently then the result would have been, that he had long existed before his coming into the world: but now that he says, 'before Abraham was, I am,' something more is implied; something that peculiarly belongs to the expression, 'I am;' and what that is we may learn from the original use of the words. They are the words which God made choice of to express his own eternity and power when Moses inquired after the name of God: he answered him, 'I am that I am. Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you:' Exod. iii. 14. What now could tempt our Saviour to use and apply this expression to himself? He knew it never had been applied to any but God, and would have been, in the man so applying it, in the highest degree, committing 'the robbery' of making himself 'equal with God:' besides, they

are a mere solecism, and according to analogy of language express nothing: no idea belongs to them; for a man cannot in his mind carry the present time back, and make it antecedent to the time already past; and therefore to say, before such a thing was, I am, is shuffling ideas together which can have no place in the mind or understanding. If therefore you admit the expression to have any meaning, you must allow the 'I am' to belong to Christ, in its proper and peculiar use, as signifying eternity and permanency of duration. For the present then let this rest; observing only, that here we find him asserting his own eternity, and St. John ascribing to him the creation of all things, which is the greatest act of power we have any notion of.

Let us now look to the other part of the question. The last time that our Saviour appeared to his disciples, to give them a full commission to teach and baptise, and full assurance of his being with them to the end of the world, he introduces his charge to them with mention of his own power and authority: 'All power,' says he, 'is given unto me in heaven and in earth:' Matt. xxviii. 18.; where it cannot be denied but that he speaks of power and authority conferred on him after his resurrection; and in virtue of this power so received, he commissions them: they were made delegates under him, with respect to the power and authority he had then received: all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; 'Go ye therefore,' and teach all nations. The word 'therefore' imports that he is giving out commissions to them to act under the power he had received: their commission was to teach, to baptise; and he promises them (which promise likewise is grounded on the same power) that he would be with them to the end of the world.

And having thus stated before you the fact, let us consider what weight there is in the great Socinian argument against the eternity of the Logos. All power, say they, was conferred on our Saviour after the resurrection; and therefore it is absurd to ascribe any power to him before: for he that receives all power is supposed to have none before he so received it. At first view the objection is plausible; but when duly considered, will be found to miss the aim: for the power spoken of in St. Matthew, and the power spoken of in St. John, belong to different and

intirely distinct states: and therefore his receiving all power belonging to one at this certain determinate time, is no proof of his not having the other before that time. He that in virtue of a royal commission receives all power to govern any part of the kingdom, cannot be said to have had no power belonging to him before: for he had at least the natural powers of a man: the powers of nature are distinct, and antecedent to the powers of his commission. And you may please to observe that the acts of power ascribed to Christ, in his different states, are intirely distinct. St. John, when he speaks of his eternal and inherent power, ascribes the creation of all things to him: and St. Paul, speaking of the same power, ascribes to it the preservation of all things. But in the Hebrews and in the Colossians, with respect to his power of office, he is styled Head of the Church: and accordingly our Saviour, when he says all power is given to him, and gives out commissions under him to the Apostles, gives out none but such as refer to the Church: All power is given unto me; therefore I appoint you to teach and baptise. He does not, in virtue of this power which he then received, give commissions for the creating new worlds, or for governing or preserving the old; but as by his power received, he then was constituted Head of the Church, he gives out commissions only relating to the Church. As for his power of creating, which is as evidently ascribed to him as any one thing, that surely is distinct from the power conferred on him at his resurrection; for it was something too late to receive power to create the world, after the world had for many ages been created. I know what is said of a new creation by virtue and holiness: but were powers, and principalities, and dominions, were things visible and invisible, nay, were the foundations of the earth and the heavens, which the Apostle says are the work of his hands, thus newly created? Was the material world redeemed, and made holy and righteous? What absurdities may we not believe, or teach, if these are the doctrines of clear and unbiassed reason.

To conclude then: it is evident that in the place now before us, and in other parts of Scripture, there are three distinct states spoken of, which belong to our blessed Lord: and this observation is so material, that without having an eye to it,

there is no understanding the Scripture, or the early writers of the Church, in the great and long controverted points concerning the eternity and divinity of the Son of God. For, on one side, it is very absurd to urge the lofty expressions in Scripture, or elsewhere, which belong to his last state, and describe the glories which he received in reward of his obedience, as proofs of his natural dignity, which he had before the worlds began: and, on the other side, it is equally absurd to apply the limitations in point of time or duration, or which in any other respect belong to the glories of his office; to apply them, I say, to the antecedent and inherent glories of his nature.

DISCOURSE L.

PART II.

THE three distinct states belonging to Christ Jesus, and mentioned in the words of the text, being supposed: the first, his state of dignity, which he was in possession of before the worlds began: the second, his state of humiliation, when he took on himself the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, which ended in his death on the cross: the third, his state of exaltation, to which he was raised by the Father, as the reward of his humility and sufferings, and which shall continue till the consummation of all things: let us now proceed,

Thirdly, to compare the several parts of St. Paul's argument together, and to examine what the Apostle teaches us concerning each of these states.

As to the two last of these states, that of humiliation and that of exaltation, the difficulties are not great. It will be readily allowed, that in the first of the two, he was very man, subject to the infirmities of human nature, and did really undergo the shameful and bitter death of the cross; that in the last, he is Lord and Head over the church, under God; that he now governs and directs it, and shall, at the last day, ap-

pear in the majesty of his Father, to judge the whole world. Thus far the generality of Christians are agreed, how widely soever they differ in their opinions concerning his first state, and the proper glories and dignities belonging to him before his coming into the world.

This state is described in the first verse of the text; 'Who being in the form of God.' In order to set forth the great humility of Christ in becoming man, the Apostle first tells us from how great and glorious a state he descended: 'He was in the form of God.' The following words, as they stand in our translation, go on to describe the excellency of his glory, which was so real and transcendent a glory, 'that he thought it no robbery to be,' i. e. he thought himself intitled to be, 'equal with God.' But I shall not insist on this translation; for it is more agreeable to the Apostle's argument, and to the language made use of, to suppose him to intend, in these words, to express the first degree or instance of his humility; and that the verse should be rendered by words to this effect: Who, being in the form of God, was not fond, or tenacious, of appearing as God; but made himself of no reputation.* I shall not trouble

* The word ἁρπαγμὸς, in the original text, is derived from the perf. pass. of the verb ἁρπάζω, rapio. Stephens explains it by *the action of plundering*; raptus, ipsa rapiendi ratio, direptio; whilst ἅρπαγμα is rendered, *the booty seized*, præda rapta. But although these verbal substantives, grammatically speaking, have an active or a passive signification, according as they are terminated in μος or μα, yet they are often used indiscriminately by the best authors; to instance only the words ἀσπασμὸς and ἄσπασμα, the former of which (see Steph. in voce) properly denotes *amplexatio*, the latter *res quam amplectimur*; yet Euripides uses one in the signification of the other; τῶν ἐν εὐνῇ φιλτάτων ἀσπασμάτων Χάριν τιν' ἕξει παῖς ἐμή; Hec. 817. Schleusner makes a similar observation on the interchange of meaning in these verbal nouns, (in voce ἁρπαγμός.) See also Eustath. in Homer. p. 1385. I consider therefore that the word ἁρπαγμὸς stands for ἅρπαγμα: indeed ἁρπαγμὸς is not known to be used by any classic author, except in one instance by Plutarch, (de Lib. Instit. § 15. Op. Moral. Ed. Wyttenbach.) and there it throws no light on the present passage. The meaning of ἅρπαγμα is well known, it being used fourteen times in the Septuagint: (see Trommius in voce:) but we must look to its signification when joined to a peculiar verb, and

you with the particular reasons of this rendering, which would lead us too far into critical inquiries: but which way soever of these two the text be understood, the τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ will be found to belong to Jesus Christ. If he thought it no robbery to assume this equality with God, (whatever is meant by it) undoubtedly he was equal: or, if it was the effect of his humility, that he did not hold or insist on his equality with God, then certainly he had such an equality; for where is the humility of not insisting on, or not retaining an equality, which never did or could belong to him?

I find some, in translating these words, make use of expressions purposely chosen to exclude Christ from the dignity here

forming a peculiar phrase. Now the only author of any note who has the phrase ἅρπαγμα ἡγεῖσθαι is Heliodorus, (Æthiop. Lib. vii. § 20.) This author, who, though he was of a low age, seems well acquainted with Greek idioms, uses the expression in the second sense which Sherlock gives to it, viz. that "he thought it not a thing eagerly to be grasped at or desired." The phrase in Heliodorus, though used only once, is confirmed by others of a similar nature, to which the same sense is strictly applicable; as ἅρπαγμα ποιεῖν, ἅρπαγμα ποιήσασθαι, and ἅρπαγμα θέσθαι. Dr. Burton, in his Testimonies of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, p. 111. has produced two instances from Eusebius of a similar usage of the phrases ἅρπαγμα θέσθαι and ἅρπαγμα ποιήσασθαι. Wetstein also has illustrated this usage by many similar ones of the same tendency: moreover we have the opinions of the fathers, critics, and commentators, so largely expressed in favor of this interpretation, that I do not hesitate to adopt it, agreeing with Whitby, that "this exposition—viz. that Christ, coming now into the world for the salvation of mankind, did not covet to appear in majestic splendor and authority, but rather chose to come in the form of a servant—gives not any advantage to the Socinians, but equally confutes their heresy, and gives a better answer to their arguments than the usual exposition can give." Dr. J. Pye Smith very properly places the *Protasis* in this passage, that is, the proposal of the terms which prepare the way for the rest of the sentence, called the *Apodosis*, immediately after the word ὑπάρχων, and not where the common version places it, after the close of the third member, or ἴσα Θεῷ, which would require a difference in the words, or the passage to have stood thus; ὃς ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων, καὶ οὐκ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγησάμενος τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ, ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσε, &c. See Sc. Test. to the Messiah, v. ii. p. 377.—Ed.

mentioned; for thus they make the Apostle speak; Who, being in the form of God, did not arrogate, assume, or lay claim to any equality or likeness with God: but I think this language bears no analogy to the words in the original, nor can be made to agree with the aim and design of the Apostle. The expression in the original is metaphorical, and alludes to the eagerness and tenaciousness with which men catch and retain the prey which they are afraid should slip out of their hands: but I believe no language knows what it is to arrogate, assume, or lay claim to a prey: a prey is to be caught, to be held fast; but not to be assumed, or arrogated, or laid claim to. Besides, it is evidently St. Paul's design to set forth the great humility of Christ Jesus: in order to this, he says, he did not greedily retain his equality with God; which, supposing the equality to belong to him, is a very great, the greatest instance of humility; but for any person, who has no right or title to such equality, to arrogate, or lay claim to it, is the utmost pitch of pride and madness: and if you so expound these words, you must affirm that the Apostle, to prove the great humility of Christ, endeavors to clear him of that, which imports the greatest pride and insolence imaginable. Whatever therefore is meant by the τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ, St. Paul evidently supposes in his argument, that it did belong to Christ before his humiliation, when he was in the form of God.

Secondly, by comparing the several parts of St. Paul's argument together, it will, I think, appear that the μορφὴ Θεοῦ and the τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ, here spoken of, are expressions that relate to the same thing;* so that he who is possessed of the

* It has often been objected to the expression μορφὴ Θεοῦ, when adduced as a confirmation of our Lord's divinity, that the word μορφὴ has not the signification of *nature* or *essence:* yet this is the very first signification assigned to it by Stephens in his Thesaurus. His words are, μορφὴ, forma: generaliter de quavis re, ut apud Aristot. in præd. qualitatis τέταρτον δὲ γένος ποιότητος σχήμά τε καὶ ἡ περὶ ἕκαστον μορφὴ: ea a philosophis dicitur dare *esse* rei. Schleusner also, among other meanings, assigns to it that of *nature* or *essence* (φύσις et οὐσία), quoting Ælian. Hist. Anim. iii. 24. Eurip. Bacch. 54. and Plat. de Repub. ii. p. 431. de Diis. ἕκαστος αὐτῶν μένει αἰεὶ ἁπλῶς ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ μορφῇ· i. e. manet simpliciter in *sua natura.* Wetstein quotes three passages from Josephus, in the second of which

first, has a right to the last. The foundation of the Apostle's argument is this; that Christ, enjoying a most exalted state of glory, was not fond, or tenacious of that glory; but made himself of no reputation: for this argument being wholly spent in setting forth the humility of Christ, there is no occasion of mentioning any other glory than that which, out of his great humility, he laid aside. The glory therefore which the Apostle here says Christ had, and the glory which he here says he laid aside, are one and the same glory, the glory which belongs to the form of God.

But farther: let us read this and the next verse together:

μορφὴ seems used synonymously with φύσις, or in a sense corresponding with οὐσία· εἰς Θεοῦ φύσιν καὶ μορφήν· (Appion. ii. 34.) This sense seems also applicable to it as used by Æschylus, Prom. 218. Γαῖα πολλῶν ὀνομάτων μορφὴ μία: as also by Hecatæus, quoted by Diog. Laertius, in Proem. de Vit. Phil. § 11. where he says that the Egyptian philosophers κατασκευάζειν ἀγάλματα καὶ τεμένη, τῷ μὴ εἰδέναι τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ μορφήν. The same also may be observed of the compound verb μεταμορφώθη in the account of the transfiguration (John i. 14. 2 Pet. i. 16.): for Christ did not appear in his usual form or nature, but as it were ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ· 'his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.' Mat. xvii. 2. Ὤφθη αὐτοῖς ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ᾗ ὑπῆρχε πάλαι· Origen. in Matt. tom. xii. § 37. If the word μορφὴ be taken in the sense of *glory* or *majesty*, it will come to the same thing as *nature* or *essence*. Beza's observation on this point is worthy of remark. "In hoc versiculo Paulus Christi divinam naturam describit, quod etiam declaratur participio ὑπάρχων· et etiamsi μορφῆς nomine non ipsam Deitatem, sed ejus tantum *gloriam* declararet, tamen (ut vere et sancte annotavit doctissimus interpres) quum gloria Dei non possit sine sacrilegio ab ipsa Divinitate separari, non potuit melius declarare Apostolus Christi Deitatem, quam cum diceret eum in forma Dei fuisse, id est verum Deum." Certainly the sense of *nature* or *essence* in μορφὴ is much strengthened by its junction with ὑπάρχων· this word naturally expresses the notion of *primary existence*, (vid. Hesych. et Suid. in voce:) and to this it is here *limited* by the word γενόμενος, in an opposite member of the sentence, a word by which an *incidental state* or a *change of being* is signified; ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος. To see the distinction between the word γίγνομαι or γίνομαι, and εἰμὶ, compare together the two following lines of Homer: ἐνθ' ἄλλοι μὲν πάντες ἀκὴν ἔσαν· Od. β. 82. Ὣς ἔφαθ'· οἱ δ' ἔσχοντο μάχης ἄνεώ τ' ἐγένοντο· Il. γ. 84. By inspecting the context we shall find, in the first instance, that the

Who, being in the form of God, did not eagerly insist to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation; or, as the original signifies, he emptied himself, and took on him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. The humility of Christ consisted in changing willingly a glorious for an inglorious condition: the glorious condition, which he was possessed of, was the form of God; the inglorious condition, to which he submitted, was the form of a servant. When the Apostle therefore says, 'Who, being in the form of God, took on him the form of a servant,' he plainly intimates to us that he obscured, or laid aside the glory belonging to the form

people *were* silent, and remained so: in the second, that they *became* silent, ceasing from the tumult of battle. Thus the opposition of γενόμενος limits the meaning of ὑπάρχων, and ὑπάρχων determines that of μορφή. He who *was made* in the form or nature of man, *existed originally* in the form or nature of God: but that Being who had *original existence* must *be* God. Christ therefore was, as our Creed expresses it, *perfect God*, as well as perfect man.

With respect to the word ἴσα, this adverb comes from the adjective ἴσος, which in its primary meaning signifies, equality with regard to *size*, as ὅμοιος does with regard to *quality*. See the Scholiast on the Phœniss. 511. on which Valckenaer remarks, "Laudat Eustath. ad Il. ε. p. 432. et tradit ὅμοιον esse ποιότητος, ἴσον ποσότητος." Writers however did not always adhere to this distinction. The word ἴσα here is a genuine adverb, although some commentators (among whom is Schleusner) think it is used for ἴσον. This however cannot be, as ἴσον must be considered in the masculine gender. The Socinian commentators say that the adverb ἴσα merely signifies *as*, in a comparative sense: but I conceive that it always retains or implies *equality*, as may seen by a reference to the numerous examples collected by Wetstein. The expression, τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ, might be rendered simply *to be as God*, if the English adverb *as* contained that idea of equality which is contained in the Greek ἴσα. But if the Apostle had wanted a mere adverb of comparison, the particle ὡς was ready to his hand; and this he does use very soon afterwards with ἄνθρωπος, where there could exist no necessity for expressing an idea of equality; καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος. But the expression τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ, as Beza rightly observes, is equivalent to the word ἰσοῦσθαι; which Tertullian translates *Pariari*. Our translators were right therefore, when they used the periphrasis, *to be equal with God*.—Ed.

of God, when he took the form of a servant: the 'form of God' therefore expresses and contains all those glories, which Christ willingly suffered to be hid in his state of humility. The very same thing is expressed by the 'equality with God' here mentioned; for it is said that he did not eagerly insist to be equal with God: now certainly that which he did not insist to keep, and that which he emptied himself of, is one and the same thing. If therefore the glories which he laid aside were 'the form of God,' and if the glories which he did not insist to keep were 'this equality with God,' you must necessarily say that the form of God, and the equality with God, are one and the same thing. What has hitherto been said does not sufficiently discover what the precise notion belonging to each of these expressions is; but it shows evidently, I think, that the equality with God, whatever it means, did as properly and really belong to our blessed Lord, before his coming into the world, as the form of God did; which, as far as I remember, all allow to be the proper character of Christ in this place, however they limit and restrain it in their various expositions.

Besides, the form of the argument affords us still a farther evidence, that St. Paul esteemed these characters to be proper and peculiar to Christ, to be his natural and inherent, not his borrowed glories: for, consider what it is that St. Paul exhorts the Philippians to: "Look not," says he, 'every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others;' that is, do not act merely on the view of your own proper good and advantage only, but take into your consideration likewise the good and advantage of your fellow creatures: he exhorts them that they should not τὰ ἑαυτῶν σκοπεῖν, look to their own things: but says he, 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.' Then he sets forth, as the argument requires he should, how little Christ regarded τὰ ἑαυτοῦ, things belonging to himself; for being in the form of God, he was not eager of appearing equal with God. This form of God therefore, and this equality with God, were certainly those things of his own, which the Apostle intended to show that he did not look to: and without taking this to be his meaning, the precept and the example cannot meet in the same point.

Suppose then here, that the form of God means the glories

proper and peculiar to the presence of God; and that to be equal with God, in this place, signifies only to be clothed with equal glories, to appear in his majesty and power; yet it deserves to be considered, who and what manner of person he is, to whom the proper and peculiar glories of God, to whom his majesty and his power do belong, and so belong to him as to be his own. Should God communicate his glories to a creature, in the highest degree that a creature is capable of receiving them; yet the glories of God, so communicated to the creature, could in no sense be said to be the creature's own glories. Our own glories are those only which are proper and peculiar to our nature; for as the Apostle elsewhere says, 'one thing differeth from another thing in glory.'

But the Apostle's mind will still farther appear as we go on: 'He took on him,' says he, 'the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself.' The form of a servant is here plainly opposed to the form of God: when he laid aside the form of God, he took the form of a servant: if we can therefore come at the determinate meaning of either of these expressions, it will certainly lead to the knowlege of the other. The true key to this place is, I think, to be found in the first and second chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews: give me leave therefore for a while to leave the Apostle to the Philippians, and to consider what the Apostle to the Hebrews teaches us.

'God,' says he, 'who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things; by whom also he made the worlds: who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power,' &c. Which amounts to no more than what the Apostle to the Philippians has said of him, in fewer words; 'Who being in the form of God.' But the Apostle to the Hebrews proceeds, and shows us wherein the true difference between Christ and all other beings lies; and places it in this determinately, that Christ was the Son of God, and all other beings, even the mightiest angels, the servants of God: 'For unto which of the

angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son. And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.' Thus you see Christ is declared to be the Son of God, and the object of the angels' worship. But of the angels the Apostle adds, 'Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire:' and in the last verse of the chapter, speaking still of angels, he says, 'Are they not all ministering spirits?'

The image which the writer to the Hebrews seems to have before him, is that of a great household: he considers God as the *Pater-familias*, the Father of Christ, and the Lord and Maker of the universe: Christ is considered as the *Filius-familias*, the Son, the Heir of all things, as he styles him: other beings are the servants and attendants of different orders, belonging to the family. And under this view it is not hard to know what the Apostle to the Philippians means, when he says, Christ took on him 'the form of a servant:' he was truly the Son of the family, the Heir of all things, and had the form and majesty of his Father; but he descended from the glories of his Father, and became like one of the family, submitting to take the form and character of a servant on him. The Apostle to the Philippians adds, 'being made in the likeness of men.' The reason and meaning of this addition the Apostle to the Hebrews will likewise teach us, ch. ii. ver. 16. 'Verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.' Angels are servants as well as men: therefore, by saying Christ took on him 'the form of a servant,' there was room left to suppose him to have taken the nature of angels: to show therefore what nature he took, the Apostle adds, he took the form of a servant 'in the likeness of men;' that is, in the nature of man. So then the *μορφὴ δούλου*, the form of a servant, is the common mark and character of all the creatures of God; the *ὁμοίωμα*, the likeness here spoken of, is the peculiar and proper character of each species: so that the *μορφὴ δούλου* and the *ὁμοίωμα ἀνθρώπου* make a complete and perfect man: he was not only a man in appearance and in likeness, but in rea-

lity, having the same common nature, distinguished by the same specific differences.*

* This sense given by Sherlock to μορφὴ δούλου, as signifying the *servant of God*, was attacked by Mr. Sykes, in a Tract intitled 'The Dean of Chichester's Conduct considered, &c. 1718.' It had been thus set forth by the Dean in his 'Condition and Example of our Blessed Saviour vindicated, &c. 1718.' "Our Saviour, when he laid aside the *form of God*, the *brightness of his Father's glory*, in order to do the *will of God*, and to *minister* to them who were to be *heirs* of *salvation*, then took on him (μορφὴν δούλου) the *form of a servant*, i. e. from appearing in the *glory* and *majesty* of God, as ruler of the universe; he took on him that *form* in which he was so to minister, and which is therefore called μορφὴ δούλου. In this sense all Christians ancient and modern (Socinians excepted) have understood the text; and little expected that the *form of a servant*, as opposed by St. Paul to the *form of God*, had any relation to the state or condition of slaves properly so called." In answer to this Mr. Sykes observes, that "*the form of a servant*, as it stands here opposed to the *form of God*, does *not* signify a *servant of God*, or a *servant to God*. It signifies (says he) that *state* which our Saviour took on himself *here*, in opposition to that *other* state which he left, in which he was in the form of God:" and in answer to the Dean's assertion respecting the sanction given to his interpretation by *all* Christians ancient and modern, he doubts if any *one* of credit in the world has so understood it: p. 32. Notwithstanding the notion of Mr. Sykes's biographer, Dr. Disney, that "his illustration of the passage may possibly be no more satisfactory than the Dean's," (Life of Sykes, p. 77.) I cannot help giving my vote in its favor. As by μορφὴ Θεοῦ we understand the *glorious nature* of God, so by μορφὴ δούλου I conceive we should understand the *low and debased nature* of man, thus aptly expressed, as having been corrupted by sin, and rendered subject, or *enslaved* to, Death; enslaved by that law which the Apostle in his Epistle to the Romans viii. 2. calls the law of sin and death, and to abolish which he there says, that God sent his own Son in *the likeness of sinful flesh*, ἐν ὁμοιώματι σάρκος ἁμαρτίας, which the learned Koppè considers as an abbreviated form for what would be at length, ἐν σώματι ὁμοίῳ τῷ τῶν λοίπων ἀνθρώπων ἁμαρτώλων σώματι: and this Law in the 21st verse of the same chapter St. Paul expresses by the very words ΔΟΥΛΕΙΑ τῆς φθορᾶς. And lest he should not be clearly understood, it would seem that the Apostle added ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος, being made in the likeness of man, or in that likeness which consists of *similar qualities:* he resembled other men in all the cha-

The Apostle to the Philippians adds, 'And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself.' It requires some attention to the Apostle's argument to distinguish rightly between the form, the likeness, and the fashion, which are all in this place applied to Christ Jesus. In the first verse of the text, the Apostle says, Who being in the form of God, did not eagerly retain his equality with God, but emptied himself: by this equality which Christ did not retain, but emptied himself of, I think it is impossible to understand any thing else but the divine glories in which he appeared, and which, during the state of his humiliation, he laid aside; his nature he could not lay aside; he continued to be the Son of God, though he appeared not like the Son of God: and therefore, the Apostle adds, being man, he was found in fashion as a man, appearing in no greater majesty and glory than what truly belonged to him as man. The fashion of a man, in this part of the text, I take to answer to the being equal with God, in the first part; that equality which he laid aside being nothing else but the σχῆμα Θεοῦ, the fashion, or truly divine and majestic appearance of God. The form of God, in the first part, answers both to the form of a servant, and the likeness of men, in the second part: the form of a servant being common to all the different orders of creatures, it did not of itself sufficiently ex-

racteristics of a real *humanity*, sin only excepted, as the Scriptures abundantly testify: ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκὶ, *he was made manifest in the flesh*, 1 Tim. iii. 16. This text alone would show us what must be meant by μορφὴ Θεοῦ· for to say that *a man* was made manifest *in the flesh* would imply no great *mystery*. The real mystery was when Christ, who is in other parts of Scripture styled εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δοξῆς αὐτοῦ, and χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως, who is said to be πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως, *became flesh*, σὰρξ ἐγένετο, or as Ignatius observes, Ep. ad Ephes. c. 7. σαρκοποιήθεις ἄνθρωπος γέγονεν· when he was *made of the seed of David according to the flesh*, κατὰ σάρκα; an expression which plainly refers to a *nature* in him distinct from the *human nature*, in respect to which he was *not* made of the seed of David. It may also be observed that the expression in the original is much stronger than in our translation: it is ΤΟ κατὰ σάρκα, '*that is* according to the flesh,' or, *as far as the flesh is concerned*.—Ed.

press what nature Christ took on him; and therefore the addition, in the likeness of men, was but necessary: but there are no different orders of beings, to whom the form of God belongs: and therefore, the Apostle having told us that Christ was in the form of God, there wanted no addition to inform us what kind or manner of being he was; for God has not communicated his form or proper glory to any of his creatures: the form of God belongs to God only.

And thus the argument for our blessed Saviour's divinity from the text stands. He had, before he came into the world, the true and proper glories of divinity, and under the Old Testament, appeared in the real majesty of his Father. Whether the proper and peculiar glories of the divinity, and the real majesty of God are communicable to a creature, judge ye. Besides, if the Apostle, by saying Christ took the form of a servant, and the likeness of men, means, that he became indeed a very creature, and man, consider what he means by the same expression in the other part, where he affirms that Christ was in the form of God; and whether he can mean less than that he was God, above all creatures, as the son of the family is superior to the servants, and subject to the father as a son, receiving of him whatever he has of power, glory, and majesty.

For the farther confirmation of the exposition of the text here given, let us consider in what manner St. Paul usually applies the example of Christ, by setting it in opposition to the corrupt inclinations and passions derived from Adam. Thus, in the fourth of the Ephesians, he calls on them 'to put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of their mind; and that they put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness:' and in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter the fifteenth, he says, 'The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.' There are many other places of the like import which occur so frequently, that there is no occasion particularly to point them out.

In this passage to the Philippians the Apostle does not expressly draw the comparison between the first and second Adam: but the account he gives of the conduct and spirit of the second Adam is so strong a contrast to the corrupt affections of the first, that there can be but little doubt of his meaning.

Look into the history of Moses: there you will find that Adam was created 'after the image of God,' and had dominion given him over the creatures of the earth; by which he became lord of this lower world. St. Paul, in the words of the text, tells us that Christ was 'in the form of God;' which gave him a dominion over the works of nature, which had their being and owed their preservation to his power. Moses gives an account how Adam, through disobedience and a vain ambition, fell from the dignity in which he was created, and intailed misery on his descendants. St. Paul says that Christ, through obedience and submission to the will of the Father, hath set us an example, by which, if the same mind be in us, we may recover what is lost. Moses tells us that Adam was tempted to eat of the forbidden fruit, on the hopes the tempter gave him, that it would make him 'like to God,' and increase him in knowlege, 'to know good and evil:' he thought it such an advantageous proposal, that he catched at the opportunity, and eagerly embraced the offer. St. Paul's account is that Christ, who had a right by nature to appear in the majesty and glory of God, yet voluntarily laid it aside, and lived and died in the world, 'in fashion as a man.' What Adam got by his bold attempt, we all know: he ran, like an eager and hungry fish to seize the bait, but was miserably deceived; he lost the prey, and swallowed only the hook: but Christ, for a recompense of his obedience, was highly exalted, and had a name given him, which is above every name.

If we admit of this reference to the case of the first Adam, it will determine the sense of those words, which in our translation are rendered, 'He thought it no robbery to be equal with God:' for in that case the opposition between the two characters would require that it should be said of Adam, that he thought it a robbery to be equal with God; which is absolutely inconsistent with the account of Moses, and to the view and reasoning of St. Paul.

DISCOURSE L.

PART III.

'And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.' He was in the form of God; but he was not fond of retaining or making show of the glories belonging to the divine form, but took on him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. This was great humility: but this was not all; for being man, he still descended lower; quitted the dignities and honors, which even as man he might have retained; submitted to the meanest condition of the sons of men, a condition exposed to scorn and contempt and ill usage; and at last became obedient unto death, and that not the common death of mankind, but of the vilest of slaves, even the death of the cross. The humility then of Christ is here plainly represented to us under two views: in one view the Apostle considers Christ, who was in the form of God, descending so low as to become man: in the other, he considers Christ in the fashion of a man, descending yet lower, and taking on himself the meanest condition, and undergoing the most ignominious death, that either the most miserable or the most wicked of mankind had ever experienced.

I have endeavored to explain all that belongs to the first instance of humility, by considering what the state was from which Christ descended, and what the state and condition to which he descended. I shall now consider this second instance of the humility of Christ Jesus in the same method, and lay before you, as far as I can discern the Apostle's meaning, the true sense and import of the words of the text. In the first instance we learnt what St. Paul's opinion was concerning our Saviour before his incarnation; in this we shall find what notion he had of him during his abode on earth.

The question you see is this: what notion had St. Paul concerning Christ, or what manner of person did he conceive him to be, when he thus described him, 'He being found in fashion as a man'?

This will appear by considering what is meant by the 'fashion of a man,' and what could lead St. Paul to the choice of that expression; and likewise by examining the instances of humility given in the text, 'the becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross;' and considering of what sort of person it can properly be said that he was humble in submitting to death.

The 'fashion of a man' denotes those proper and distinguishing characters which belong to a man as such, by which he is known to be what he is; that is, by which he is known to be a man, and not any other kind of being: for whoever appears with any marks or characters which show him not to be a man, or to be more than a man, cannot be said to appear in the fashion of a man. Whoever will be at the pains to consider St. Paul's use of the original word, and of the verb derived from it, will find this account to be true: thus, for instance, he tells us of Satan's 'transforming' himself into an angel of light, and of his ministers 'transforming' themselves into the Apostles of Christ; in both places using the verb derived from the original word in this place; and in both places his meaning is, not that Satan became an angel of light, or his ministers Apostles of Christ, but that Satan appeared in the fashion of an angel of light, so as not to be known from an angel of light, and his ministers in the fashion of Apostles of Christ, so as not to be distinguished from them. By the 'fashion of a man' then, we can understand only the true and real appearances of a man.

Let us proceed then to consider what led St. Paul to this expression, and why he might not as well say, and 'being man,' he humbled himself, as, 'being found in fashion as a man,' he humbled himself: for this we must look back to the first rise of the Apostle's argument. The person here spoken of, Jesus Christ, was in the form of God, but 'emptied himself:' emptied himself of what? Not of his being or nature, but of the glories and majesty belonging to him: being in the form of God, he laid aside the glories proper to the form of God, and took on him the form of a servant, in the likeness of men. Whatever he was as to nature and essence, when he was in the form of God, that he continued to be still, when he became

man: but the σχῆμα Θεοῦ, the glories of the form of God, he laid down: and though he continued to be the same, yet, as to the σχῆμα, as to outward dignity and appearance, he was mere man, being found, as the Apostle says, 'in fashion' as a man. Had the Apostle conceived him, whilst here on earth, to have been mere man only, in what tolerable sense could he say of him, 'being found in fashion as a man?' for in what fashion should a man be found, but in the fashion of a man? What need was there of this limitation, that he was found a man as to his fashion, unless in reality he was something more than man? But if you consider the man Jesus Christ to be the same person who was in the form of God, and who, according to that dignity of nature, had a right to appear in the majesty and glory of God, it is proper to ask, how did he appear on earth? And the Apostle's words are a proper answer to the question, 'He was found in fashion as a man.'

The Apostle perhaps had another view in the choice of this expression, 'And being found in fashion as a man;' with respect to what follows, 'he became obedient unto death:' for it might well seem strange that any should attempt the life of him, who was himself the Lord of life. He became obedient unto death: but how came he to be called to this obedience? Who was the bold man that laid hands on this God on earth, and was vain enough to think of compassing his death? To which the Apostle gives this previous answer: 'He was found in fashion as a man;' as such, his life was attempted, and he became obedient unto death. This I take to be the import of the word 'found;' he was 'found' in fashion as a man, and became obedient unto death. By whom was he found? by those who sought his life, and called him to the obedience, which he readily paid. If you allow the Apostle to have had this view, you must needs suppose that he thought him more than mortal man, when he is at some pains to assign a reason that could tempt any one to think him liable to death. Had he been mere man, there would have wanted none of this caution and circumspection: the greatest are liable to death, and liable to fall by the attempts of the lowest, who, if they are wicked enough, and desperate enough, have ground sufficient to hope

for success, from the common mortality from which the greatest of the sons of men are not exempt.

Secondly, let us examine the instances of humility given in the text, and consider to what sort of person they can be applied as such: 'He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.' Death is the common end of all mankind; and if to die be humility, in this respect all are equally humble. How comes Jesus Christ then to be distinguished by this instance of humility? How comes that to be humility in him, which in every body else is necessity? If you speak of mere man, you may as properly say that he is humble in having two legs or two arms, as in submitting to death, since both are equally the course and work of nature: and yet you plainly see that the Apostle reckons it great humility in Christ, that he submitted to death. What manner of person then was Christ Jesus, over whom death had no power, but through his own consent and submission? Mortal he was, or else he could not have died; more than mortal he was, or else he could not have avoided death; in which case, to die had been no humility. You must allow then, that St. Paul, in arguing as he does concerning Jesus Christ, necessarily supposes him to be more than mere man; to be that person, who was found in fashion as a man, because he willingly quitted the divine glories belonging to him: who died, because he willingly laid down his life, which no man could take from him.

Let me observe farther, with what accuracy St. Paul speaks on this subject: in the first instance of his humility, when he quitted the glories proper to the form of God, the Apostle says, 'He emptied himself,'* ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτὸν: for the form of

* This is the proper meaning of the word here: our translation, *made himself of no reputation*, does not half express it. He made himself of no reputation by *exanimition*, or emptying himself of that glory, that parity with God, which he had in his own right: for, says Chrysostom in his seventh homily on this Epistle, τοῦτο, τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ, οὐχ' ὡς ἁρπαγμὸν εἶχεν, ἀλλὰ φυσικόν· διὸ ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτόν. Now ἐκένωσε is one of those peculiar words in the Greek language, which will express the primary and secondary sense at one view, without periphrasis: another of them is ἐσκήνωσεν John i. 14. where it is said

a servant, and the likeness of men, which he took on him, were inconsistent with divine glories; they could make no part of them: had he retained the glories of God, he could not have come in the form of a servant, or the likeness of men; and therefore he emptied himself of those glories. In the second instance, the Apostle considers Christ Jesus as found in fashion as a man, and humbly submitting to death, even the death of the cross: now to die, to die even on a cross, has nothing in it incompatible with the fashion of a man; all who die, all who are executed, die in fashion as men: and therefore the Apostle does not say here that he emptied himself, for he retained the fashion of a man; but he says, 'he humbled himself:' the humility therefore here spoken of bears no relation to the fashion of a man here spoken of; for the fashion of a man suffered no diminution, it continued one and the same; he was as much in the fashion of a man on the cross as he was before: the humility therefore relates to the person, and his real dignity, in distinction to the appearance and fashion in which he was found. With respect to the person of Christ Jesus, who was in the form of God, to die was great humility: with respect to the fashion in which he was found, it was no humility; for he was found in fashion as a man, and he died but as the sons of men often die.

But farther; the Apostle had before told us that 'Christ took on him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men:' this indeed was great humility; for him, who was in the form of God, and had a right to appear in the glories and majesty of God; for him, I say, to descend to a servile condition, to become mere man, was great humility: but being man, to die seems but a natural consequence; for death is the

that the Word was made flesh and *dwelt* with us; whereas the verb in the original gives the idea of *making to itself a tabernacle*, or of *entering into a human covering as into a tent*. And it is worthy of observation, that, as St. John applies so remarkable a word to the Logos when he took our nature on him, that is, when his *double nature* was concerned, St. Paul here does the same: but when the question is merely about his *human nature*, in which alone he could be said to suffer, then the Apostle uses a verb which admits not a figurative sense: 'being found as a man,' *he humbled himself*, ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτόν.—Ed.

common, the natural end of all men: how comes the Apostle then, after he had told us that Christ Jesus became man, to give us this as a distinct and farther instance of his humility, that he 'became obedient unto death?' This seems to be only the necessary consequence of his being man. Had he, when he became man, ceased to be what he was before, death had been but the natural and necessary consequence of the change: but though he was man, yet being Lord of all things, it was always in his power, as he himself has told us, to take up his life and to lay it down; for as St. Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter ii. verse 8. expresses it, speaking of those who put Christ to death, 'they killed the Lord of life,' or the Prince of life; which expression occurs likewise in St. Peter's sermon: being then, even whilst on earth, and clothed with human flesh and blood, the very Lord of life, and upholding all things by the word of his power, he was superior to the necessity of human nature, and subject to death only because he chose to die. To die therefore was great humility: to die on the cross still greater; submitting to the malice of those wretches, who, whilst they were destroying him, lived only by his power, who was the Prince of life. It was humility therefore to become man: after he was man, it was humility to die; since the powers of life were in his own hand, and he could both lay down his life, and take it up. If you consider what St. Paul says in this view, his discourse is just, the example full; but without this support, you will hardly find either his argument, or the humility of Christ Jesus.

DISCOURSE L.

PART IV.

'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should

confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' In these words the Apostle sets before us the exceeding great glory to which God the Father exalted Christ, as the end and reward of his great humility and sufferings: words which very well deserve our serious attention and consideration, as instructing us in the true reason, and discovering to us the true foundation of the honor and worship and glory, which the Christian church has ever, and still continues to give and pay to our blessed Lord.

There is indeed a difficulty in conceiving how any accession of glory or honor should be made to him who was, before his coming into the world, 'in the form of God,' and, as such, was in possession of the majesty and glory belonging to the form of God; and yet the Apostle's argument seems to suppose an accession of honor to be made to him on his exaltation, as the reward of his humility and obedience. For thus the argument stands: Jesus Christ, who was in the form of God, and in possession of divine glory, laid aside the divine glory, and took on him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and appearing as mere man, he submitted to death, even the death of the cross: wherefore God, as a reward to his humility, has 'more' highly exalted him, (for so the original word signifies) and given him a name above every name. This glory therefore, according to the strain of the Apostle's reasoning, ought to be a more excellent glory than the first glory: for if God gave him nothing but what he had a right to, according to the very excellency and dignity of his nature, how did he reward his humility? To exalt a man for his humility is to raise him to a station above what he had before his humility: according to parity of reason therefore, the glory to which Christ was exalted, as a reward to his humility, ought to be a greater glory than that which he had before his humility.

But how can these things be? you will say: how can he, who is 'the brightness of his Father's glory, the express image of his person,' how can he be exalted in glory? or what greater glory can we conceive than 'the glory of the only-begotten of the Father?' especially considering that Christ himself, in praying for glory for himself, prays for no other glory than that which he had before the world was: 'And now, O Father, glorify

thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was:' John xvii. 5.

To set this matter in a true light, you must consider that the glories of nature, and the glories of office are very different and distinct glories; that the Apostle, in the place before us, says nothing of nature or essence; he speaks of the Person Jesus Christ, and considers him as the same Person in all his different states of glory, humility, and exaltation: the same nature which he had being in the form of God, the same he had in his state of humiliation, and now has in his state of exaltation: so that the Apostle does not consider him in his exaltation, as having any higher nature, or greater natural powers and dignities, than he had before his exaltation; and it would indeed be very absurd to suppose he did; for the exaltation of any person does not consist in a change of nature, or natural powers, but in acquired honors and authority. When a man is raised to be a king, he is still a man, has still the natural powers of a man, without increase or diminution, though he receives new honor and new authority.

The Apostle's argument does not then infer that the natural powers and dignities of Jesus Christ were increased, or that they were capable of being increased; but only that, in consequence of the redemption, God put all things immediately under him, making him head over all, and consequently intitled him to that worship and those honors, which were not before paid to him. Christ Jesus was indeed subservient to his Father in the creation of the worlds: 'By him all things were made, and without him was not any thing made that was made:' John i. 3. And yet the worship and honor which flow from the relation of the creature to the Creator always were paid, and still are paid, to the Father; for the evidence arising from the works of nature lead to the acknowlegement of one, and but of one, great Being; and therefore there could be no pretence of setting up another, either in opposition or conjunction with him, to be an object of worship: but when Christ undertook and completed the redemption of the world, then it was thought proper to make known the glory which he had before the worlds began; that we might know that we were to expect salvation from a hand that was able to save, and that the honor and duty owing to

him who made us, and to him who redeemed us, might be consistent: for when Christ purchased mankind at the price of his own blood, they became his by the strictest bonds of justice and gratitude; there arose a new relation between the Redeemer and the redeemed, and the duty and worship and honor which flow from that relation, are immediately owing to Christ Jesus.

Thus Christ having perfected the redemption of the world, was by the Father made Lord of all things: all things were put in subjection under him, and the head of every man is Christ: we are no longer our own, but Christ's, being bought with a price, even with the precious blood of the Son of God. This is the Scripture account of the matter, almost in Scripture words: and you see here is no room to speculate about nature or essence, or to suppose that Christ, before his exaltation, was less honorable as to his nature and essence; any more than there is room to suppose that God was less honorable, as to his nature, before the creation, because at the creation the sons of God sang together for joy, and paid new honors and adorations to the great Creator.

Having, I hope, removed this difficulty, I shall proceed to consider the doctrine of the text, in the following method:

First, that the power and authority exercised by Christ Jesus, in and over the church of God, are derived from this exaltation: and consequently,

Secondly, that the honor and worship paid to Christ, in and by the church of God, are founded in this exaltation.

Thirdly, that the power and authority exercised by Christ, and the honor and worship paid to Christ, are and ought to be ultimately referred to the glory of God the Father.

These propositions are so evidently contained in the words of the text, as to be subject to no doubt in the explication: but it may be of service to show that the doctrine is agreeable to, and is confirmed by, the whole tenor of Scripture.

First, I am to show you that all power and authority, exercised by Christ Jesus in and over the church of God, are derived from this exaltation.

And the first authority which I shall produce, in confirmation of this proposition, is a very great one, even that of our blessed

Lord himself; who, after his resurrection, and not long before his ascension, appeared to his disciples, and gave them a solemn commission to teach and baptise in his name: but before he gave them commissions, he did, as it were, open his own, which was the foundation of theirs; 'All power,' says he, 'is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world:' Matt xxviii. 18. 19. 20. In this place you hear our Saviour declaring all power and authority to be given him at his resurrection; in consequence of which power, he commissions his disciples to convert, baptise, and instruct the world. There is no doubt but this power is part of the exaltation which St. Paul speaks of in the text, to which God raised Christ for his sufferings: you see likewise, that the powers delegated to the ministers of the church derive themselves from this power so received; and, consequently, all acts done by them in the name of Christ are founded in the power which he received at his resurrection.

St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, ch. i. 4. expressly tells us that 'Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.' God had before, at his baptism, and at his transfiguration on the mount, declared him to be his 'well-beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased;' but at his resurrection he was declared not only to be his Son, but to be his Son 'with power.' If you look forward to the fourteenth chapter of this Epistle, you will find the Apostle's sense of this matter very fully and clearly expressed; 'For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living:' so that the power over all things, the dominion both of the dead and the living, commenced at the resurrection, which was indeed the very first step to glory and honor which our blessed Saviour took after his state of humiliation and sufferings; for though, according to our conceptions, his pains and sufferings ended on the cross, yet in the grave there is neither honor nor glory: in his resurrection he first and truly appeared to be himself, to be the Lord of life and glory.

In his Epistle to the Colossians, towards the middle of the first chapter, St. Paul speaks largely of the person of Jesus Christ: he represents to them his great dignity and glory, by setting before them the part which he bore in the creation of all things, and likewise the authority and power to which his Father raised him, and which he now exercises as head of the body, the church. And this place is the better worth your attention, because the Apostle does not only distinguish between the power by which Christ created all things, and the power by which he governs all things as head of the body, the church: but he has likewise distinguished and marked out to us the different sources and originals, from whence these two powers flow. In the fifteenth verse he thus speaks of Jesus Christ: 'Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature: all things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.' With respect to this great work of the creation, you see St. Paul considers him as being before all things, as being the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature: immediately the Apostle adds, 'And he is head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead.' This surely is a very different beginning from that which he mentioned before; and yet this beginning, which is his resurrection, is plainly laid down as the foundation of the principality and headship which he holds over the church; he was the beginning, the ἀρχὴ, with respect to the creation of all things, being the first-born of every creature: he is the beginning and head of the church, being the first-born from the dead.

I shall mention but one place more to you, and that so plain a one, that I shall not need to spend much of your time in it: it is in the Epistle to the Ephesians, and the first chapter, where St. Paul tells them, that his prayer for them was, 'that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowlege of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which

he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who filleth all in all.' What can be added to this description of power and authority? and yet the Apostle, you see, founds all this on his resurrection, and his exaltation consequent to it: then were all things put under his feet; then was he given to be head over the church, and set above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named. The Scripture abounds in evidence of this kind: and I think there is nothing plainer in the gospel than that Christ Jesus is our Lord, because he hath redeemed us; that he is our King, being raised by the Father to all power and authority; that he is our Mediator and Intercessor, being set down on the right hand of God in the heavenly places. But,

Secondly, all honor and worship paid to Christ, in and by the church of God, are founded in this exaltation.

This is a natural consequence of what has been already said. The title which Christ Jesus has to receive honor and worship, and adoration in the church, is the reason and foundation on which honor and worship and adoration are paid him in the church. What his title is, you have already heard; and consequently, the foundation of the church's worship has been already manifested: but that your faith may not stand in the words of man's wisdom, I will lay before you the evidence of Scripture in this point also.

In the Revelation of St. John we have several hymns recorded, which the church of the first-born sing to God and to his Christ; and we cannot form our devotions from a better copy than that which they have set us. In the fourth chapter, the four-and-twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne saying, 'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were cre-

ated.' Here you see plainly that the adoration paid to God the Father is founded on his being the Creator of all things: look a little farther into the next chapter, and you will find the same persons praising and adoring Christ Jesus, saying, 'Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.' Here you as plainly see the worship paid to Christ to be founded in this, that he was slain, and did by his blood redeem us: nay, the very choir of angels sing praises to him in the same strain, saying, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.' From all which it is evident that the worship paid to Christ is founded on the redemption, and relates to that power and authority which he received from God at his resurrection.

In the text St. Paul tells us, 'that God has given Christ a name above every name—that every tongue should confess that Christ is Lord;' where confession implies much more than a bare acknowlegement that Christ is the Lord; it comprehends those honors and that worship which those who heartily confess him to be the Lord will naturally and readily pay him. How this confession must be made, and from what ground it must proceed, the same Apostle, in his Epistle to the Romans, has very fully acquainted us: 'This,' says he, 'is the word of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt confess Jesus to be Lord,' (for so the words ought to be rendered) 'and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved:' c. x. 8. 9. Here you see St. Paul requires all men to honor the Lord Jesus, on this account, because 'God hath raised him from the dead.' Every man must 'honor the Son, even as he honoreth the Father:' this honor paid to the Son must proceed from this principle of faith, that in your heart you believe that God raised him from the dead, and made him Lord of all. This confession, grounded on this belief, St. Paul calls 'the faith which we preach,' that is, the gospel doctrine, that faith by which a man shall be saved: and this is indeed the true gospel point to convince

men, that the blessed Jesus, who died for their sins, did indeed rise again, and now sits in power and glory at the right hand of the Majesty on high; that he is Lord over all, and able to save all who come to the Father by him. Without this belief, Christianity is a vain delusion: for if Christ be not risen from the dead, and exalted to glory, 'then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.' But if he be risen from the dead, if he now reigns in power at the right hand of the Almighty, if he received this power, and if he uses it in order to our salvation; can any thing be more absurd than to deny him those honors which are due to him in consequence of his glory, and necessarily flow from the relation we stand in towards him? The danger which some apprehend, in paying this duty to their Redeemer, of robbing God of his peculiar honor, and setting up a new and distinct object of worship in opposition to those plain commands which confine our religious service to God alone, will vanish away, if we consider, in the last place,

That all powers exercised by Christ, all honors paid to him, are ultimately referred to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The honor and worship paid to the Son must either be part of the service we owe to God, or it must be inconsistent with it. If we have found out a new object of adoration for ourselves, we are offenders against the law, which says, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve:' but if we honor Christ in consequence of the power and glory conferred on him by God, and in virtue of a command received from God, to honor the Son even as we honor the Father, then the honor we pay to Christ is part of the service we owe to God, and arises even out of that command, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.'

Our Saviour has told us, 'that all power is given unto him;' in which he asserts both his own and the Father's authority; his own, as being invested with all power; his Father's, as being the author and fountain of all the power claimed and exercised by the Son. He has told us by his Apostle that at the consummation of all things the Son shall resign his power, 'that God may be all in all;' a sufficient declaration that the power now exercised by him is the Father's power,

which, as it is at last to be given up to him, so was it at first received from him.

From hence it is manifest that the honor paid to Christ is ultimately referred to God the Father; for the honor paid to Christ being founded in the power and glory to which he is exalted, the honor paid must naturally follow the power and glory to which it relates, and at the last, terminate in the fountain and origin of that power and glory, even God the Father.* By this means the peculiar honor of God the Father is secured, whilst we worship and adore the Son. If we adore the Son, it is because of the relation to the Father: if we honor our Redeemer, that honor must redound to his glory, who was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself: if we apply it to Christ as our high-priest, at the same time we acknowlege his glory who anointed him to this office: if we worship him who is Head of the church, we cannot but adore him who gave Christ to be the Head of the church: if we fall down before him who has all power and might, at the same time do we confess the excellency of the Father, who hath given him all power, and put all things in subjection

* εἰς δόξαν Θεοῦ Πατρός. I conceive that *the glory of God the Father* here means, the dissemination of true religion, and reverence paid to God in the name of Jesus the Mediator of the Christian covenant. 'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples:' John xv. 8. It is the will of the Deity that worship should be paid to God the Father, through God the Son, by the prevailing influence of God the Holy Ghost. This division of the Godhead, as to personality, is declared in the Scriptures not to affect the unity of the Deity; and however incomprehensible the fact may be to us, we are bound to believe it, on the authority of God himself, who has *revealed* it. We may observe that in the New Testament the Father is said to glorify the Son, as well as the Son is said to glorify the Father (John xvii. 1. 5. &c.): and with regard to prayers put up in the name of Christ, our Saviour himself asserts his equality with the Father, when he declares to his disciples, 'whatsoever ye shall ask *in my name*, that will *I* do, *that the Father may be glorified in the Son*. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, *I* will do it:' (John xiv. 13. 14.) And this was immediately after he had said unto them, 'believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me.'—Ed.

under him. So that we cannot honor the Son, as we ought to do, but we must at the same time honor the Father with the honor due to him. And this sufficiently shows that the gospel has not strained the precepts of natural religion, in teaching us to honor the Son, whom the Father hath exalted to the right hand of his majesty on high, and given to be the head over all principalities and powers, even to the consummation of all things.*

* Having endeavored to elucidate some clauses in the remarkable passage which Sherlock selected as a text for the foregoing four discourses, I shall here subjoin such a free translation of the original, as, without departing materially from the letter, may exhibit in one short view my opinion of its import. 'Let the same sentiments be in you as were even in Christ Jesus: who, though he had a pre-existence in the glorious nature of God,—did not eagerly covet to retain this parity with God, but on the contrary divested himself of his glory, having assumed an enslaved or subject nature, being made in the likeness of men;—and being found (i. e. known) to be in fashion (i. e. in real condition) as a man, he humbled himself, becoming subject to death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of all who are in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'—Ed.

END OF VOL. II.

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